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Brecht's reception of Stanislavski, 1922 to 1953

Jones, Victoria

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BRECHT'S RECEPTION OF STANISLAVSKI, 1922 TO 1953

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ABSTRACT

The present study will attempt to analyse Brecht's reception of the methods and ideas of Konstantin Stanislavski between 1922-1953 and will mainly consider the relationship with regard to 'Theatertheorie', rather than offering an analysis of specific examples of 'Theaterpraxis'. The approach is chronological and has been designed to situate Brecht's reaction to the System within the context of the differing cultural-political circumstances which exercised an influence upon it. The study begins with an examination of the appropriation of Stanislavski's System in the USA – where practitioners placed particular emphasis on the introspective aspects of the Soviet practitioner's methodology. Chapter One will consider the implications of this *mediated* incarnation of the System for Brecht's own, often deliberately *selective*, reception of the Stanislavskian approach. Focusing on the Theatre Union's Stanislavski-inspired production of *Die Mutter*, Chapter Two will investigate how valuable this artistic *débâcle* was in providing Brecht with the underlying rationale for the methodological advancement of the Epic Theatre. The effect of Brecht's encounter with the American Stanislavskians will be considered in connection with his subsequent attempts in the late 1930s to reposition his own methodology in a constructive antithesis to the System.

Part Two examines the second major phase of Brecht's Stanislavski-reception during the period following his return to the GDR and his response to the System within the context of the rigorous state sanctioning of Stanislavski's approach. Chapter Three will consider the tendency in recent criticism to interpret Brecht's re-evaluation of the Soviet practitioner's work in the 1950s as a purely tactical response to mounting political pressure. The study will examine two principal aspects of Stanislavski's later methodology – the 'method of physical action' and the role of perspective – the latter as an overlapping Stanislavskian-Epic concept which has been largely ignored by secondary literature on Brecht's reception of Stanislavski. The study concludes with an examination of Brecht's production of Erwin Strittmatter's *Katzgraben* in 1953 and the extent to which the theoretical endorsements of the 'Stanislavski-Studien' were put into practice at the rehearsals, and considers whether the final relationship can be viewed as a matter of 'reception', in the true sense of the word, rather than absolute antithesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviated forms of reference are used to indicate works which are frequently cited in this study:

- BBA** Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv der Akademie der Künste zu Berlin
- BHB** *Brecht Handbuch in fünf Bänden*, ed. by Jan Knopf. (Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler, 2001-2003). Details of the individual volumes are given in the Bibliography.
- GBA** Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. by Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller. 30 vols + *Registerband*. (Berlin-Weimar: Aufbau; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988-2000)

INTRODUCTION

Brecht's first direct encounter with Stanislavskian theatre occurred in 1922 when the Moscow Art Theatre visited Berlin as part of their European tour. Typical of an earlier period of their work, and almost identical to that of their previous visit in 1906,¹ the repertoire for the Moscow Art Theatre's tour of 1922 included performances of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Aleksei Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor*, *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorki and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*.² Critics were unanimous in their praise for the company. According to Claus Just, "es gab kaum einen deutschen Kritiker, der sich dem erschütternden Eindruck des Ganzen entziehen konnte".³ At the

¹ The company had first toured Germany in 1906, opening at the *Berliner Theater* with a performance of Aleksei Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor*. As well as Tolstoy's play, the Moscow Art Theatre's repertoire during this early tour consisted of Maxim Gorki's *The Lower Depths*, Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters*, and *An Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen. Visiting Leipzig, Dresden, Hanover, Karlsbad, Frankfurt am Main and Wiesbaden, the Art Theatre's performances were met with widespread critical commendation. In *My Life in Art* Stanislavski himself recalls the overwhelming success enjoyed by the company during their first tour of Germany: "At the end of our guest season, which lasted some six weeks, our success was not only artistic, it was material. We were dined and honoured by the German actors, by societies, by individuals". Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* trans. by E. Reynolds Hapgood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 414.

² As Sharon M. Carnicke states, the choice of repertory during the Art Theatre's second tour of Germany did not accurately reflect Stanislavski's interests at that time and had been selected because it was "least controversial at home, where political wars over the arts were beginning". However, as she points out, it only served to fix the Western conception of Stanislavski "at the earliest phase of the Moscow Art Theatre's history". Sharon M. Carnicke, 'Stanislavsky: Uncensored and Unabridged', *The Drama Review*, 37, no.1 (Spring 1993), 22-37 (27).

³ Claus Just, *Stanislawski und das deutschsprachige Theater: Daten, Texte und Interpretation bis 1940*. Doctoral dissertation. (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität: Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1970), p. 309.

beginning of October 1922 Brecht attended a performance of *The Three Sisters* by the Art Theatre accompanied by Nicholas Nabokov, Kurt Weill, Isadora Duncan and the Russian poet Sergei Esenin. Nabokov recalls that the group “sniggered indecently” throughout the production.⁴ Whilst ‘Krankhafte Neigung’, written by Brecht in 1926, ties in with Nabokov’s account, characterising the inclination to laugh at inappropriate places in the theatre as a deliberate form of provocation, it seems that by and large the episode had little effect on Brecht, who in fact appeared not to have grasped its significance:

Im Theater [...] ist es meine Lieblingsbeschäftigung, *an unpassenden Stellen zu lachen*. Diese vielleicht krankhafte Neigung entspricht einem metaphysischen Bedürfnis, sich selbst mitunter als *intelligenter Mensch* vorzukommen. [...] Es wird sogar oft sehr ungünstig beurteilt, da man es lieber sieht, wenn jemand ein fremdes Nest beschmutzt als sein eigenes. (GBA 21, p. 155)

Brecht’s failure to recognise the valuable potential of his first encounter with Stanislavskian theatre may be due, in some large part, to the fact that the Soviet director’s performance approach did not exert the same contagious influence in the Weimar Republic as it would in America following the Art Theatre’s tour of 1923.⁵ Whilst Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre were

⁴ Nicholas Nabokov, *Time in Reverse*. BBC Third Programme broadcast 11.6.58, quoted in Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils: A Critical Study of the Man, his Work and his Opinions* (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 32.

⁵ Brecht’s low-key reaction to the visitors compares interestingly with that recorded by Lee Strasberg the following year during the Art Theatre’s subsequent tour of America: “The first visit of the Moscow Art Theatre was for us not only an event of deep personal significance in our lives, but an event of enormous importance in our theatre. It came at the beginning of the rise of American theatre, when the American theatre was finding its voice [...] It was therefore not simply something we appreciated or enjoyed [...] I am sure that all of us feel a special bond”. Sharon M Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1988), p. 21.

undoubtedly well received in Germany, their influence did not produce a Method culture in the way that they would in the United States. On the contrary, in the culturally progressive climate of the Weimar Republic, Stanislavski's style of production was out of step with cutting-edge theatrical developments, and traditional, representational theatre of the type witnessed by Brecht during the Moscow Art Theatre's Berlin engagement of 1922 was already something of a dying form. Influenced by the Soviet avant-garde – the theatre productions of Meyerhold, Tairoff and Vachtangov, as well as the films of Eisenstein and Vertov – such a post-Expressionist climate reinforced the decline of conventional, naturalistic stage forms. By the early 1920s the German theatre had progressed away from a Stanislavskian means of representation and had renounced the theatre of Naturalism (the psychological style of which had been perfectly suited to Stanislavski's approach)⁶, for more experimental modes of artistic expression:

The "in" theatre was that of Tairoff and Pirandello and Piscator and Meyerhold [...] wherever one turns in the Berlin theatre of the twenties one sees that major assaults were being launched on the kind of theatre we associate with the early Stanislavski. All three of the major Berlin directors of the 1920s, Max Reinhardt, Erwin Piscator

⁶ Gerhart Hauptmann had been particularly influenced by Stanislavski's psychological approach to acting. In *My Life in Art* Stanislavski attests to Hauptmann's admiration of the Moscow Art Theatre and its methods. According to Stanislavski's account, Hauptmann attended all of the performances by MAT during its Berlin engagement in 1906: "It was at our performances that Hauptmann first became acquainted with the Russian dramatic art. I was told that during the intermissions, Hauptmann [...] expressed rather loudly his opinion of Chekhov and the [Moscow Art] Theatre, and the opinion was flattering to both [...]. Hauptmann said that he had always dreamed for his plays of such acting as he saw in our Theatre [...] – simple, deep, and rich in content. Specialists had told him that such acting was impossible because the theatre had its own demands and conventionalities. Now at the sunset of his literary activity, he saw at last what he had always dreamed of." Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 415.

and Leopold Jessner, had all moved well away from the early style of Stanislavski by the time Brecht went to Berlin.⁷

Stanislavski's first book, the autobiographical *My Life in Art*, was not published in German translation until 1951 – arguably confirmation that the demand for further information on his system was insubstantial amongst theatre practitioners in the Weimar Republic.⁸ Stanislavski's theatre of emotional identification was simply no longer deemed relevant in a cultural climate which, by the mid 1920s, was characterised by a sober and matter-of-fact utilitarianism exemplified in 'Die neue Sachlichkeit'. Far removed from what was expected of a revolutionary society, Stanislavski's productions "left little trace" in Weimar Germany.⁹

Preceding Brecht's experiences with the American proponents of Stanislavski's approach some thirteen years later where, in contrast, the latter's system was being widely disseminated and developed by left-wing workers' collectives, the impact of Stanislavski's performance methodology on the theatre climate of mid 1920s Weimar Republic could not have been more different. In the USA Stanislavski's *My Life in Art* appeared in 1924 to an enthusiastic reception – two years before its publication in the USSR. Had the System exerted the same far-reaching influence in Germany as it would in America, it is conceivable that Brecht's initial response to Stanislavski might have been more informed. Instead Brecht's early encounter with Stanislavskian theatre is characterised by his failure

⁷ John Fuegi, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos, According to Plan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 43.

⁸ By contrast, Alexander Tairoff's book *Das entfesselte Theater* appeared in Germany in 1923.

⁹ John Willett, *The Theatre of the Weimar Republic* (New York-London: Holmes and Meier, 1988), p. 79.

to perceive the potential of the Soviet approach as a theoretical antithesis to his own. It would not be until after the Theatre Union's Stanislavskian production of his play *Die Mutter* in 1935 that Brecht would come to recognise the importance of the System as a target for his theatrical polemics.¹⁰

Although Brecht's personal and theoretical notes from the 1920s do not contain any direct reference to the Soviet practitioner, it nonetheless becomes clear from an examination of his writings from this time how useful, in polemical terms, the 1922 encounter with Stanislavski could have been for Brecht. A number of models are established in the notes of the 1920s that would gain a much sharper polemical focus after Brecht had identified Stanislavski as a specific adversary and his methods as an underlying justification for the Epic Theatre following his experiences with the American proponents of the Soviet approach. A journal entry from 10 February 1922, written just a few months before the Moscow Art Theatre's opening in Berlin, fully reinforces that sense that Brecht's subsequent encounter with the premises of Stanislavskian theatre in October of that year

¹⁰ Similarly, the Soviet director's influence in the Scandinavian host countries in which Brecht spent his exile was incomparable to the reception of the System in America. Despite the fact that Naturalism was the dominant force in Danish theatre until the 1930s (formal experimentation was the domain of workers' theatres and amateur collectives), Brecht remained isolated from Stanislavski during his exile there – a factor which might be explained by the fact that the Moscow Art Theatre did not tour any of the Scandinavian countries. Whilst Brecht's 'Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt' (*GBA* 22.2 pp. 641-659) refers to the actor Poul Reumert, one of the most renowned Danish actors at that time and a devotee of the naturalistic school of acting, there is nothing else in Brecht's notes to indicate that the theatre situation in Denmark prepared him for the Stanislavski fever he encountered in the USA.

represented a missed opportunity. The effort to limit the spectator's empathic involvement, in order that their 'isolation' be preserved, is described by Brecht *ex negativo* – a strategy he would employ again in the major theoretical notes of the 1930s. The journal note describes how the spectator *does not* identify with the hero on stage:

Einen großen Fehler sonstiger Kunst hoffe ich im »Baal« und »Dickicht« vermieden zu haben: ihre Bemühung, mitzureißen. Instinktiv lasse ich hier Abstände und Sorge, daß meine Effekte [...] auf [der] Bühne begrenzt bleiben. Die splendid isolation des Zuschauers wird nicht angetastet, es ist nicht sua res, quae agitur, er wird nicht beruhigt dadurch, daß er eingeladen wird, mitzuempfinden, sich im Helden zu inkarnieren und, indem er sich gleichzeitig betrachtet, in zwei Exemplaren, unausrottbar und bedeutsam aufzutreten. (GBA 26, p. 271)

Rejecting the idea of the actor's total transformation into the character and the orthodox premise that the audience should be hypnotised into believing the illusion of reality on stage, Brecht's notes of the 1920s criticise the convention of *total* empathy between actor and audience. 'Letzte Etappe: Ödipus', written in 1929, illustrates Brecht's early, yet unfocused, renunciation of identificatory theatre. Predating Brecht's criticism of Stanislavski's empathic characterisation methods in the 1930s and his attempts to theorise an alternative technical position, the essay indicates how crucial an opponent Stanislavski would become within the context of Brecht's theoretical advancement of the Epic Theatre:

Unsere dramatische Form beruht darauf, daß der Zuschauer mitgeht, sich einfühlt, verstehen kann, sich identifizieren kann. [...] Wie muß also unsere große Form sein? [...] Episch. Sie muß berichten. Sie muß nicht glauben, daß man sich einfühlen kann in unsere Welt, sie muß es auch nicht wollen. (GBA 21, p. 279)

Similarly, in 'Dialog über Schauspielkunst', printed in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* in February of the same year, Brecht expressed his frustration with the political ineffectuality of empathic acting:

Wie sollen sie denn spielen? [...]

Bewußt darbietend. Schildernd.

Wie machen sie es jetzt?

Mit Zuhilfenahme der Suggestion. Sie versetzen sich selber und das Publikum in Trance. Sag ein Beispiel!

Sie haben etwa den Abschied darzustellen. Was machen sie? Sie versetzen sich in Abschiedsstimmung. Sie wollen, daß das Publikum in Abschiedsstimmung gerät. Niemand sieht zuletzt, wenn die Séance glückt, mehr etwas, niemand lernt etwas kennen, im besten Fall erinnert sich jedermann, kurz: jedermann fühlt. (GBA 21, p. 279-80)

Drawing on metaphors of mysticism and illusion, the essay establishes a hypnotism model which will become much more polemically focused in the light Brecht's trip to New York in 1935. On the basis of his experiences with the American Stanislavskians Brecht would charge the Soviet practitioner with concocting an elaborate technique synonymous with cultic initiation and responsible for fostering oblivion in the theatre. As John J. White points out the appearance of the word 'Suggestion' close to the words 'Trance' and 'Séance' in 'Dialog über Schauspielkunst':

establishes a connection between identificatory acting and hypnotism [...] long before Brecht has encountered the classic embodiment of such an approach: in the American reception of the Stanislavsky-System.¹¹

The article also contains an early allusion to the element of astonishment which he considered central to a performance. Indeed, this early note confirms that Brecht

¹¹ John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), pp. 55-6.

was using the method of ‘Verfremdung’ long before its theorizing in the major compositions of the 1930s, as an alternative to the type of illusionist theatre exemplified by Stanislavski’s empathic approach:

Nicht nahekomen sollten sich Zuschauer und Schauspieler, sondern entfernen sollten sie sich voneinander. Jeder sollte sich von sich selber entfernen. Sonst fällt der Schrecken weg, der zum Erkennen nötig ist [...]. Wenn ich den dritten Richard sehen will, will ich mich nicht als dritter Richard fühlen, sondern ich will dieses Phänomen in seiner ganzen Fremdheit und Unverständlichkeit erblicken. (*GBA* 21, p. 280)¹²

Juxtaposing the features of his Epic Theatre with those of the conventional ‘dramatic’, or Aristotelian, theatre, the ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper »Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny«’ written in 1930, represent Brecht’s first comprehensive account of his proposals for Epic Theatre. Again Brecht evokes an hypnosis model to demonstrate how, as “Wachs [...] in den Händen der Magier” (*GBA* 24, p. 81), the spectator:

[wird] [...] eingeschmolzen [...] und [darstellt] einen passiven (leidenden) Teil des Gesamtkunstwerks [...]. Solche Magie ist natürlich zu bekämpfen. Alles, was Hynotisierversuche darstellen soll, unwürdige Räusche erzeugen muß, benebelt, muß aufgegeben werden. (*GBA* 24, p. 79)¹³

Yet despite the self-promoting status of the ‘Mahagonny’ notes, without the perceived “mystischen, kultischen Charakter” of Stanislavski’s System as a fixed antithesis such models lack specificity. Instead the plethora of pejorative terms

¹² Similarly, ‘Die dialektische Dramatik’ of 1930 uses a ‘Nicht-Sondern’ formulation to indicate a link between the idea of ‘Verfremdung’ and performance technique, stating that the action of characters “wurde als nicht selbstverständlich, sondern als auffällig hingestellt” (*GBA* 22.1, 249).

¹³ The notion of the spectator as a passive victim of the artistic experience anticipates Brecht’s definition of the *forcing* of empathy as a fundamentally barbaric operation. This aspect will be discussed further in Chapter Two (see pp. 133-35).

used by Brecht in the notes to characterise the type of theatre diametrically opposed to the Epic Theatre – such as ‘kulinarisches Theater’, ‘dramatisches Theater’ and ‘Aristotelisches Theater’, as well as the concept of the Wagnerian ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ – are vague and un-illuminating. As polemical weapons the terms are little more than abstract expressions of abuse which, unsupported by precise examples, lack the firm theoretical underpinning that only the repositioning of his methodology as an antithesis to Stanislavski’s System would accomplish. Indeed, whilst Eric Bentley states that Aristotelian theatre was a fundamental part of the “hypnotic, anti-critical theatre which Brecht so loathed; it meant ‘carrying the audience with one’, ‘losing oneself in the play’”¹⁴, it would not be until Brecht’s materialization as a self-appointed arch anti-Stanislavskian in the major theoretical essays of the late 1930s that such phrasing would have its full and incisive effect. Having found a fixed theoretical opponent, the rather broad-brush polemic of the ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper »Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny«’ and Brecht’s early theoretical essays gives way to a new focus in these later notes – shifting the emphasis from structural matters and audience response to the traffic between stage and spectator and, above all, the actor’s *performance technique*. Whilst the 1930 ‘Anmerkungen zur »Dreigroschenoper«’ boldly state that the Epic Theatre’s use of ‘Literarisierung’ facilitates “ein besseres und anständigeres Spiel”, Brecht’s essays of this period fail to offer any satisfactory explanation of just what form this new type of acting will take (*GBA* 21, p. 59). In contrast, his experiences with the American Stanislavskians would

¹⁴ John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (London: Eyre Methuen, 3rd rev. edn, 1967) p. 172.

prompt a rigorous reformulation of the Epic Theatre during the late 1930s and, as ‘Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt’ demonstrates, the deliberate construction of ‘Kontrafakturen’ to established Stanislavskian techniques – a factor which undermines the view that Brecht produced nothing “wesentlich Neues” in terms of theory during his period of exile.¹⁵

In contrast to the fortunes of Stanislavski’s approach amongst practitioners in the Weimar Republic, the Soviet director’s standing could not have been higher in the USSR, where his System was soon to be officially designated the vehicle of theatrical Socialist Realism. First introduced to the Soviet public in May 1932 by Ivan Gronskey, President of the Organisation Committee of the Writers’ Union, Socialist Realism was formally institutionalised in 1934 at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers by Stalin’s spokesman for ideological affairs, Andrei Zhdanov. As the official cultural policy, the aesthetic would dictate the direction that art and literature were to take in the USSR and the Soviet Union’s satellite states until Stalin’s death in 1953. The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) and all other literary associations had been dissolved in 1932 and replaced by the single Union of Soviet Writers. From now on artistic policy in the Soviet Union would be controlled directly through the Party. All Soviet authors were expected to join the new Union and demonstrate their

¹⁵ The *Brecht Handbuch* claims that Brecht produced nothing new theoretically during his exile, but merely “Bestandsaufnahme und nochmalige Vergewisserung” of earlier statements. Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB4*, p. 225.

unconditional commitment to socialism and the depiction of Soviet reality in their work. Under the new artistic programme, optimism and a dedication to the cause of socialist construction became the basic prerequisites of a literature “impregnated with enthusiasm and the spirit of heroic deeds.”¹⁶ The First Statute of the Union of Soviet Writers defined the role of literature under the new aesthetic as:

the creation of works of high artistic significance, saturated with the heroic struggle of the world proletariat and with the grandeur of the victory of Socialism, and reflecting the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist party.

The arts were officially ‘socialised’ and assigned a major role in the education of the masses:

That is why untiring work directed towards self-education and towards improving their ideological equipment in the spirit of socialism represents an indispensable condition without which Soviet writers cannot remould the mentality of their readers and thereby become engineers of human souls.¹⁷

The codification imposed on artistic creativity by the conventions of Socialist Realism stipulated a literature that was class-conscious, partisan and one which focused on the truthful and historically concrete depiction of life in its advance towards socialism:

Socialist realism means not only knowing reality as it is, but knowing whither it is moving. It is moving towards socialism, it is moving towards the victory of the international proletariat. And a work of art created by a socialist realist is one which

¹⁶ A. Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature - the richest in ideas. The most advanced literature’, in H. G. Scott (ed.), *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), (pp. 15-24) p. 20.

¹⁷ A. Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature - the richest in ideas. The most advanced literature’, p. 23.

shows whether that conflict of contradictions is leading which the artist has seen in life and reflected in his work.¹⁸

Never before had literature been so closely identified with the political aspirations of the Soviet Union. Whilst the Party relentlessly wielded its authority to ensure the imposition of the official cultural line, the strongly utilitarian purpose of Socialist Realism served the ideological and propaganda needs of the government and was instrumental in strengthening the authority of the state. Intent on organising Soviet literature into “a potent instrument of socialist culture”¹⁹, official policy declared artistic commitment to the literary programme imperative. Yet, despite the fact that Socialist Realism was to become an inviolable diktat of Communist ideology, officials were at pains to reassure artists that the Party was not about to pass “any resolutions on literary questions [...] binding on all writers.” A. I. Stetsky, head of the Culture and Leninist Propaganda Section, informed those present at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers that they should not interpret every statement as:

some kind of canon, some kind of platform, in which every word and every comma is fixed and unalterable, in which everything must be carried out to the letter. This is not so, comrades. This would mean cramping creative initiative.²⁰

In an effort to conceal the extent of state control over the arts and the largely *political* purpose of what was being promulgated as very much a *literary*

¹⁸ K. Radek: ‘Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art’, in H. G. Scott (ed.), *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934*, pp. 73-162 (p. 157).

¹⁹ M. Gorky, ‘Soviet Literature’, in H. G. Scott (ed.), *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934*, pp. 27-69 (p. 64).

²⁰ A. I. Stetsky, ‘Under the Flag of the Soviets, under the Flag of Socialism’, in H. G. Scott (ed.), *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934*, pp. 261-71 (p. 263).

phenomenon, Socialist Realism was dressed up in pseudo-literary formulae and portrayed as the logical outcome of socio-historical development. Official policy emphasised its literary genesis, suggesting that Socialist Realism represented a tendency in literature which had existed long before its adoption by the Party. Yet whilst rejecting the “stunted [...] themes, talents, authors, heroes” which he condemned as “characteristic of the decadence and decay of bourgeois culture”²¹, Zhdanov defined a cultural policy which would ultimately enervate the arts by eliminating free and independent creativity. By the mid 1930s, any work found lacking the requisite “high ideological and artistic content”²² and indulging in what was considered formalist innovation, was deemed at odds with the socialist function of art and systematically suppressed.

Yet whilst creative integrity was evaluated according to the extent to which a piece of art was deemed to comply with official Party policy, the concept of Socialist Realism nonetheless remained vague and imprecise. Compliance with the new aesthetic meant respect for the Russian classics, for the literature of Gorki and Tolstoy and yet, as the officially endorsed ‘basic method’²³ of Soviet literature, Socialist Realism lacked any rigorous theoretical underpinning and was, on the contrary, never defined by the Party in any real sense:

²¹ A. Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature – the richest in ideas. The most advanced literature’, p. 19.

²² A. Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature – the richest in ideas. The most advanced literature’, p. 24.

²³ A. Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature – the richest in ideas. The most advanced literature’, p. 21.

The theorists of socialist realism [...] showed almost no interest in aesthetics, especially in intrinsic problems of art, such as the role of intuition or the peculiarities of the creative process, which were dismissed as “subjective idealism”.²⁴

In spite of the differing form in which they had been written, works such as Sholokhov’s *Quiet Flows the Don* and Fadeyev’s *The Rout* were extolled as exemplars of literary Socialist Realism – all that seemingly mattered was that a piece of art idealized Soviet reality in a way which complied with the official line. Indeed, as Herman Ermolaev explains, Socialist Realism was significantly designated as a ‘basic method’ rather than a style, thus making it eminently:

more adaptable for utilitarian political applications. Its designation as a style might have suggested an undesirably close relation to literature as an art.²⁵

Emphasising content over form, the purveyors of Socialist Realism thus assumed that the depiction of reality could be separated from the style and means by which it was portrayed. The Socialist Realist aesthetic was elusive, insubstantial and devoid of theoretical coherence:

The decisions that came from on high were arbitrary. There was no apparent logic or consistency to them. Artists attempted to read the signs, to guess what the party line on any particular work or issue would be [...] to construct a possible ‘line’ out of hints.²⁶

Yet, the imprecision of the definition of the new aesthetic was entirely intentional – its very lack of consistency made it eminently suitable as a means of imposing damning artistic verdicts *as and when* the Party saw fit. It was essentially a

²⁴ Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 205.

²⁵ Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934*, p. 6.

²⁶ Inna Solovyova, ‘The Theatre and Socialist Realism, 1929-1953’, in Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (eds), *A History of Russian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 325-57 (p. 330).

functional ambiguity perpetuated to serve the political purpose of the State. Moreover, the Party's plans for works of high artistic accomplishment were essentially at odds with the tastes of the masses at whom such works were ostensibly aimed. Rather than reflect the culture of the audience the definition of artistic directives remained the right of those in power. As David Bethea points out, this elitist exclusivity had its purpose, ensuring that Socialist Realism could be manipulated by the Party at any time to suit the shifting needs of the state. Such inner inconsistencies were clearly at odds with the attempt to impose the semblance of artistic uniformity upon literary productivity:

The fact that this method "demanded" that the writer be historically truthful and concrete, i.e. objective, on the one hand and ideologically right-minded and properly didactic, i.e. prescriptive, on the other, meant that the mold pulled both ways and could be made to say different things in different contexts.²⁷

Socialist Realism was extended to all realms of artistic output within the USSR, to include the control of the theatre and the practical interpretation of drama on the Soviet stage. As part of the rigorous ideological reconstruction that was taking place, actors and directors in the USSR were likewise compelled to comply with Socialist Realist requirements. More than any other artistic form the theatre represented the Soviet aspiration to surpass the West both aesthetically and politically. For that reason the demands placed on the theatre under the new aesthetic were, from the beginning, immense. As the stage could be used to communicate officially approved representations of reality, its potential for public

²⁷ David M. Bethea: 'Literature', in Nicholas Rzhevsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 161-204 (p. 196).

persuasion and state-sanctioned edification was considerable. With its capacity to present positive heroes and model modes of behaviour, the theatre was a vital force in the construction of Socialism.

By the mid 1930s Konstantin Stanislavski had become the official figurehead of theatrical Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union. However, his canonisation by the Party remains a somewhat complex and paradoxical issue. Whilst revolutionary theatres such as Meyerhold's were ultimately suppressed, the essentially bourgeois Moscow Art Theatre was officially declared an institution of exemplary stature. Nevertheless, the bourgeois character of the Art Theatre seems inconsistent with Stalin's plans for a classless socialist society which was to be reflected in its cultural output. In considering the reasons why Stanislavski might have been appropriated for Stalin's ideological cause, Sharon M. Carnicke has pointed to such factors as the sound artistic credentials of his theatre, its international reputation, as well as Stanislavski's venerable age.²⁸ The latter is a significant aspect in Stanislavski's canonisation for, like Gorki, he represented a pillar of Soviet art in-the-making from the late nineteenth century. Whilst Brecht would use the factor of anachronism in his notes to criticise the System and imply its obsolescence, it was vital for the Party to identify a tradition to which the new state could lay claim. What is more, Stanislavski's theatre offered a meeting place not just for life and art, but also for art and Party propaganda. The utilitarian

²⁸ Sharon M. Carnicke: 'Stanislavsky: Uncensored and Unabridged', 24. Carnicke emphasises the apparently *arbitrary* nature of Stanislavski's ascendancy to the official emblem of Socialist Realist policy in the theatre, highlighting his transformation "willy nilly [...] into Stalin's theatrical prototype".

purpose of Socialist Realism was perfectly suited to Stanislavski's theoretical approach: plays endorsing the Soviet *status quo* could be realised in a style which, dissuading the audience from questioning social reality, compelled their acquiescence with prevalent political attitudes. Encouraging the audience's *belief* in the 'given circumstances' of the play, Stanislavski's theatrical proposals provided the means of imposing a Party-line, idealised version of Soviet life upon what was being passed off as everyday reality. Favoured by the regime, Stanislavski's approach encouraged:

actors and spectators alike [to] believe unquestioningly that the action was 'real'; the fostering of uncritical, regimented belief was the key tenet of Stalinist aesthetics.²⁹

Reinforcing the Soviet authoritative discourse, Stanislavski's approach was thus manipulated to consolidate state supremacy:

There is little doubt that the state's canonisation of the Moscow Art Theatre, and its espousal of Stanislavskyan versions of realism were devices used to underpin an orthodox promulgation of that state's self-image – ostensibly humane and considerate of individual thought and feeling – when the real world outside the theatre required definition in much more complex terms.³⁰

Stanislavski's System became a potent instrument in sustaining this self-image. In response to the new artistic climate, his experimental excursions into symbolism and non-representational dramatic forms (which, with plays such as Hamsun's *The Drama of Life* and Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, had begun to dominate Stanislavski's productivity during the pre-Revolutionary period) were conveniently disregarded. Instead, the System was applied to Russian classics and

²⁹ David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 74.

³⁰ Nick Worrall, *The Moscow Art Theatre* (London-New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 6.

officially approved contemporary plays which glorified Soviet achievement and flattered the Soviet sense of nationalism and patriotism. Underplayed too were the psychological aspects of Stanislavski's approach such as 'emotion memory'³¹ and the 'magic *if*'³² since they were seen to represent a challenge to state authority. The introspective techniques were considered too subjective and impenetrable to serve the ideological purposes of the Party. Instead the 'method of physical action'³³ was singled out by cultural politicians as the culmination of Stanislavski's work:

³¹ Stanislavski's technique of 'emotion memory' (a term borrowed from the French psychologist Théodule Ribot (1839-1916)) involves the actor recalling previously experienced emotions by summoning the accompanying sensory details of the original experience. This will in turn become a cue for the feeling required of the role. The analogy which results from "the coincidence of emotion memories with the sensations called for by the part", has the effect, Stanislavski states, of drawing "the actor closer to the person he is portraying. [...] This identification results in a miraculous metamorphosis". *An Actor Prepares*, trans. by E. Reynolds Hapgood (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), p. 285. 'Emotion Memory' is the most controversial of Stanislavski's psycho-techniques and, in the form of Lee Strasberg's derivative interpretation, represents the cornerstone of the American Method.

³² The 'magic *If*', another of Stanislavski's psycho-techniques, acts as a lever which lifts the actor "out of the world of actuality into the realm of imagination". Starting from the given circumstances of a play, the actor asks "What would I do if I were in the same situation?" Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 46.

³³ By the 1930s Stanislavski had begun to explore the 'method of physical action' Following the new technique, the actor creates a logical line of actions which, preceding from the 'given circumstances' of the play, is directed towards a specific objective. The technique assumes, as Sharon M. Carnicke has pointed out, "that the emotional life can be more easily aroused and fixed for performance through work on the physical life of a role". *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 177. Stanislavski describes the technique as a means of conveying "the story of the plot [...] in terms of physical actions", *Creating a Role* trans. by E. Reynolds Hapgood (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 253.

By purging the “system” of realities that might be discovered in an actor’s personal emotions, experience, perceptions, and presence, socialist realism [...] portrayed a singular, “official” reality.³⁴

Compared to the self-analytical nature of the experiential psycho-techniques, the ‘certainty’ of the ‘method of physical action’ proved more appealing to Stalinist ‘Kulturpolitiker’. In creating the myth of Stanislavski, Soviet critics emphasised his work on physical action – almost to the exclusion of the early introspective methods – in an effort to bring the approach into line with Marxist dialectical materialism. The ‘method of physical action’ provided an objective and more tangible basis for character analysis which was preferable to the impenetrable idiosyncrasies of the psycho-techniques. Balanced against the early subconscious methods, the new approach was:

seized by the Soviets as being in line with their Marxist dialectic: it was physical, visual, provable, scientific. Hence the Method of Physical Actions was keenly welcomed and promoted by politicians and practitioners alike.³⁵

Yet, as Carnicke points out, such a linear interpretation of Stanislavski’s work in the Soviet Union distorted the System as surely as the psychological reading of his performance approach in America, thereby enabling Soviet critics to dismiss the:

‘errors’ of Stanislavski’s youth as misguided experiments. [...] Just as history culminates in the creation of Communism, the System culminates in the Method of Physical Actions.³⁶

³⁴ Dennis C. Beck, ‘The Paradox of the Method Actor: Rethinking the Stanislavsky Legacy’, in David Krasner (ed.), *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 261-82 (p. 268).

³⁵ Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky: The psycho-physical approach to actor training* (London-New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 5.

³⁶ Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 150.

Drawing on the dramatic forms of the nineteenth century, the Art Theatre's production methods were more compatible with the Socialist Realist call for the theatre to follow established models than anything offered by avant-garde innovation – a factor which further served as a sufficient guarantee of its aesthetic reliability. Looked upon as a fundamental force in the struggle for the rebirth of mankind, the Art Theatre found itself alongside the Party in the midst of the ideological war being waged against 'formalism' during the 1930s. In accordance with Stalin's dubious 'humanistic' crusade, Stanislavski's stagecraft was regarded as an innocuous alternative to the 'dehumanised' and unorthodox idiosyncrasies of the *avant-garde*, providing the official vehicle for applying Socialist Realism to the theatre:

with supreme irony, Stanislavsky's own principles began at this historical juncture to converge with an official ideology of dogmatically promulgated 'socialist realism'. By 1937, this official humanist/realist ideological offensive against 'formalism' [was] now running in grotesque tandem with the ideas of the officially 'canonised' Stanislavsky.³⁷

During the years that followed all Soviet theatres were firmly persuaded to emulate the example set by the Moscow Art Theatre. Deified by the establishment, the Soviet example would enjoy a similarly iconic status some twenty years later in the young German Democratic Republic, where strict cultural policy declared Stanislavski's methodology synonymous with the ideological task of national legitimation.

The present study will attempt to analyse Brecht's reception of the methods

³⁷ Nick Worrall, *The Moscow Art Theatre*, p. 207.

and ideas of Stanislavski between the period 1922-1953, during which time he moved from a highly critical stance towards a seemingly more conciliatory position, and will mainly consider the relationship with regard to ‘Theatertheorie’, rather than offering an analysis of specific examples of ‘Theaterpraxis’. Existing criticism of the Brecht/Stanslavski complex falls into two distinct categories: that which, like Margaret Eddershaw’s examination of the two practitioners, is informed by a comparative analysis of dramatic theory from a *practical* perspective³⁸, and Germanistic, *literary* criticism which has tended to focus on a circumscribed period – namely Brecht’s reception of Stanislavski during the 1950s – such as that advanced Werner Hecht.³⁹ The following study will attempt to bring the approaches into a bigger picture, whilst at the same time avoiding the selectivity of the latter. Thus, our analysis will examine Brecht’s early reception of Stanislavskian methodology, taking into account the *mediated* nature of the System’s transmission to America, before moving on to investigate the implications of its status in the GDR for Brecht’s artistic output. The Stanislavski

³⁸ Margaret Eddershaw, ‘Acting Methods: Brecht and Stanislavsky’, in Graham Bartram and Anthony Waine (eds), *Brecht in Perspective* (London: Longman, 1982), 128-144. Similarly, most of the essays which comprise *Brecht, Stanislavski und die Folgen*, a volume of material published in 1997, focus on the relationship between the two approaches from a purely *practical* point of view. The exception is Werner Hecht’s essay entitled “‘Der Pudding bewährt sich beim Essen’ – Brechts ‘Prüfung’ Stanislavskis 1953’. See Ingrid Henschel, Klaus Hoffman and Florian Vaßen (eds), *Brecht, Stanislavski und die Folgen: Anregungen für die Theaterarbeit* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1997).

³⁹ Werner Hecht, ‘Grund der Empörung über eine ‘ganz unerträgliche Behandlung’: Brechts Stanislavski-Studium 1953’, *Maske und Kothurn*, 33, nos 3-4 (1987) 75-87. Briefly referring to Brecht’s experience with the American left-wing Stanislavskians in the 1930s, Hecht’s essay does not examine the relevance of the early Stanislavski commentaries and lacks any *significant* attempt to establish a pre-history to Brecht’s later stance on the Soviet practitioner’s approach.

scholar Jean Benedetti has helpfully gestured towards the significance of “what Brecht knew [and] what he was in a position to know about Stanislavsky and his ideas at any given moment”⁴⁰ and yet, surprisingly, prevailing Brecht criticism has lent scant consideration to the notion that his reception of the System represented a *process* of understanding profoundly shaped by the political and aesthetic co-option of Stanislavski’s work in the Soviet Union, America and East Germany. It is clear that Brecht’s understanding of Stanislavski’s methods was dependent on the nature of the information that was accessible to him *at any one given time*. For this reason, the present study will consider the extent to which the divergent interpretations of the Soviet director’s work might have influenced both Brecht’s understanding of the approach and, significantly, his own theoretical *manipulation* of the System.

My approach is chronological and has been designed to situate Brecht’s reaction to Stanislavski’s System within the context of the differing cultural-political circumstances which exercised a formative influence upon it. Part One examines the introduction of the System to America and its evolution into the Method as a hugely influential acting approach favoured by workers’ theatre collectives. Contrary to most existing analyses of Brecht’s reception of Stanislavski which have tended to focus on the GDR period, the following study will begin with an examination of the nature of the System’s appropriation in the

⁴⁰ Jean Benedetti, ‘Brecht, Stanislavsky, and the Art of Acting’, in Marc Silberman and Maarten van Dijk (eds), *Brecht Then and Now, Brecht damals und heute. The Brecht Yearbook 20* (Madison: International Brecht Society, 1995), pp. 101-11 (p. 102).

USA – where practitioners placed particular emphasis on the introspective aspects of Stanislavski’s methodology. Unlike existing literature, the resultant analysis will consider the implications of this *mediated* incarnation of the System for Brecht’s own, often deliberately *selective*, reception of the Stanislavskian approach. Focusing on the Theatre Union’s production of *Die Mutter*, Chapter Two will investigate how valuable this artistic débâcle was in providing Brecht with both a theoretical antagonist and the underlying rationale for the methodological advancement of the Epic Theatre. The energising effect of Brecht’s encounter with the American Stanislavskians will be considered in connection with his subsequent attempts to reformulate his own methodology in the late 1930s, towards a demystified and politicised performance approach.

Part Two examines the second major phase of Brecht’s Stanislavski-reception during the period following his return to the GDR and his response to the System within the context of the rigorous state sanctioning of Stanislavski’s approach. Chapter Three will consider the tendency in recent criticism to attribute tactical explanations to Brecht’s re-evaluation of the Soviet practitioner’s work in the 1950s, and will address various attempts by commentators such as Jan Knopf, Petra Stuber and Detlev Schöttker⁴¹ to categorize his reappraisal of the System as a strategic, quick-fix response to mounting political pressure. Matthew Philpotts has issued a valuable warning against the “tendency in Brecht criticism to over-

⁴¹ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980), pp. 465-66, Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen: Studien zum DDR-Theater* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1998), pp. 170-71, Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), p. 238.

privilege tactical explanations for his behavior in the GDR”.⁴² In an attempt to offset dominant efforts to rationalize Brecht’s ‘Stanislawski-Studien’ as a deliberate act of self-preservation “um das epische Theater nicht ganz aus der Diskussion herauszukatapultieren”,⁴³ my analysis will explore the possibility that his re-evaluation of Stanislavski’s approach during the 1950s might, on the contrary, have been a genuine one. Documenting the increased availability in the GDR of Stanislavski-related secondary literature in translation, Hecht has correctly identified the significance of the ‘method of physical action’ to Brecht’s reassessment of the System. In addition to the ‘method of physical action’, the present study will examine a further aspect of Stanislavski’s later work, namely the role of perspective, as an overlapping Stanislavskian-Epic concept which has been largely ignored by secondary literature on Brecht’s reception of Stanislavski. In response to Knopf’s claim that any attempt to establish a synthesis between the practitioners’ work is “eine Erfindung der DDR-Brecht-Forschung”,⁴⁴ Chapter Three will provide a detailed consideration of the relevance of these theoretical modifications to the System to Brecht’s own methodology. The study concludes with an examination of Brecht’s production of Erwin Strittmatter’s *Katzgraben* in 1953 and questions the extent to which the theoretical endorsements of the

⁴² Matthew Philpotts takes an essay by Brecht entitled ‘Erwin Strittmatters *Katzgraben*’ (*GBA* 24, pp. 437-41) which, praising Strittmatter and his Socialist Realist drama *Katzgraben*, was published in *Sinn und Form* at a time when Brecht was otherwise making dissenting interventions in GDR cultural politics, as the premise for his claim that Brecht’s interest in *Katzgraben* was “not just a matter of short-term expediency”. Matthew Philpotts, “‘Aus so prosaischen Dingen wie Kartoffeln, Straßen, Traktoren werden poetische Dinge!’ Brecht, *Sinn und Form*, and Strittmatter’s *Katzgraben*”, *German Life and Letters*, 56:1 (2003), 56-71, (56).

⁴³ Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven*, p. 238.

⁴⁴ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*, p. 466.

‘Stanislawski-Studien’ were put into practice at the rehearsals merely, as has been suggested, in a deliberate attempt “to please the palate” of the Party,⁴⁵ or whether one can begin to discern more genuine motives behind Brecht’s application of the System.

⁴⁵ Carl Weber, ‘Brecht and Communism: Clear-sighted Ambiguity or Blurred Vision?’, in James K. Lyon and Hans-Peter Breuer (eds), *Brecht Unbound* (London: Associated University Press, 1995), pp. 19-28 (p. 22). Similarly, John Willett has dismissed the *Katzgraben* production as “evidence of a considerable effort on Brecht’s part to meet the requirements of the official aesthetic of the day”. John Willett (ed. and trans.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 2nd edn, 1978), p. 251.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

STANISLAVSKI RECEPTION IN AMERICA

The Introduction of the System

Following their European engagements of 1922, on 8 January 1923 the Moscow Art Theatre launched their tour of America with a production of *Tsar Fyodor* at New York's Al Jolson Theatre. The tours of Europe and America had been organised with the aim of bringing in some much needed hard currency to the Theatre which had been struggling since the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921 and the subsequent withdrawal of all state theatre subsidies. In a letter written shortly before the company's departure for Europe, Nemirovich-Danchenko (co-founder of the MAT) sought to reassure Stanislavski, who had expressed his concern regarding both the reception of his ideas in Europe and the financial viability of the tour:

you need not worry about the 'backwardness' of our art. They have, no doubt, gifted actors [...], but, generally speaking, all their stage novelties are merely technical tricks. Your way of *creating the actor* is the newest thing there is.¹

¹ Quoted in David Magarshack, *Stanislavsky: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 357. Ironically, Nemirovich-Danchenko's criticism of the European avant-garde is similar to Brecht's own rejection of "l'art pour l'art" experimentalism in the 'Anmerkungen zur Oper »Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny«'. The term "l'art pour l'art" is normally associated with the French Parnassian poets of the 19th Century. Brecht's use of the term to describe the radical experimentalism of the Weimar scene is undertaken in order to suggest anachronism within dominant, present-day theatre practices and is thus comparable to the strategy he uses when describing culinary drama as Aristotelian or accusing Stanislavski of being a Naturalist to imply their anachronism: "Neuerungen [...] stellen Fortschritte dar, wenn man einen grundsätzlichen Funktionswechsel dieser Institutionen durchführen will. [...] Wirklicher Fortschritt ist nicht

Though doing little to relieve the economic pressures faced by the Art Theatre, the European engagement proved a triumph with the critics, in turn serving to prime American audiences for the ensemble's forthcoming New York opening. Hailing their arrival as the advent of a creative religion for the stage, American critics heaped advance praise on the company, likening the effect of their productions to "a contagious alchemy of the spirit":

Stanislavsky implanted in his associates an inner vision of plays and roles and a general method of spiritual and psychological [...] interpretation which distinguishes the theatre's productions from all others.²

Similarly, in an article entitled 'News of the Russians' printed in the *New York Times*, the critic Cyril Brown described the "religious awe" which had overwhelmed the audience at a performance of *Tsar Fyodor* in Berlin.³

Anxious to secure a favourable reception in America, Stanislavski was fully aware of the cost of failure there, informing Nemirovich-Danchenko: "It is certainly a great thing to be successful in America [...] but [...] I should like to warn everybody against the danger of being unsuccessful here."⁴ Whilst the Soviet press hounded Stanislavski during the visit, charging him with pandering to the

Fortgeschrittensein, sondern Fortschreiten. [...] Wirkliche Neuerungen greifen die Basis an" (*GBA* 24, pp. 83-84). In this instance Brecht is concerned to differentiate between innovations, which only serve to sustain outdated, obsolete institutions and his own theatrical advances, with which such innovations might mistakenly be identified.

² Oliver Sayler, 'Europe's Premier Playhouse in the Offing', *Theatre Magazine* (October 1922), 215, quoted in Christine Edwards, *The Stanislavsky Heritage* (London: Peter Owen, 1965), p. 221.

³ Cyril Brown, 'News of the Russians,' *New York Times*, 22 October 1922, 1, quoted in Christine Edwards, *The Stanislavsky Heritage*. p. 223.

⁴ Letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko, March 1923, quoted in D. Magarshack, *Stanislavsky: A Life*, pp. 365-66.

capitalists, American newspapers labelled him a communist agent and accused the Art Theatre of attempting to glorify the Soviet Union in their productions. Yet thanks to the level of artistic expectation that had preceded the Art Theatre's engagement, such reports could do little to diminish the success of the tour, and the company largely managed to avoid any awkward political issues arising from unfavourable relations between the Soviet Union and their host country.

The American tours spanned two seasons and enhanced the Art Theatre's international reputation as an institution of artistic excellence. The impact on theatre audiences in America was so great that, despite the fact that this was only 1923, the engagement was labelled "the most important theatrical event of this decade".⁵ The American reception of the Art Theatre was, as Christine Edwards extensively documents in *The Stanislavsky Heritage*, consistent in its praise for the company. The totality of illusion and cohesiveness of the company's ensemble playing made such a profound impression upon the American theatre scene that one critic observed:

the acting is so good that we are convinced that it is not acting. We feel that we are intruding into a room where a most private conversation is taking place. We feel like saying, 'I beg your pardon, I made a mistake', and stepping out again.⁶

The range of credible performances was of a quality hitherto unseen on the American stage. Commending the ensemble for the very things with which Brecht

⁵ Robert Allerton Parker in *The Independent*, 3 February 1923, quoted in Christine Edwards, *The Stanislavsky Heritage*, p. 230.

⁶ The *Christian Science Monitor's* review of *The Three Sisters*, quoted in Christine Edwards, *The Stanislavsky Heritage*, p. 232.

would later come to find fault, the critic of the *New York Journal* praised the “utter self-forgetfulness of the actors”:

These Russian actors evinced complete oblivion to an audience [...]. Here were people concentrated upon their work [...] taught to sink their personalities.⁷

It seems that Stanislavski was not only aware of the instantaneous impact his theatre had had upon the American stage, but also sensed the formative influence his techniques would exert on American acting approaches for years to come. Unlike Brecht who, little more than a decade later, would discover the American stage under the sway of Stanislavski’s teachings and thus largely unresponsive to his own innovations, Stanislavski found American audiences receptive to his ideas, encountering the theatre in what he called an “embryonic stage”.⁸ Indeed, despite the fact that the tours had not proven financially rewarding, their ultimate triumph lay, as Stanislavski himself clearly realised, in introducing the fundamentals of his stage practice to a responsive American audience:

I am [...] almost convinced that America can’t now do without us [...]. The American people has a feeling for the theatre. They grasp individuality like no one else, seek it out and know how to value it.⁹

⁷ Alan Dale in the *New York Journal*, quoted in Foster Hirsch, *A Method To Their Madness: The History of the Actor’s Studio* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1984), p. 56.

⁸ Letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko, January 1923, quoted in Foster Hirsch, *A Method To Their Madness*, p. 51.

⁹ Letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko, 12 February 1924, in Jean Benedetti (ed.), *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters* (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 322. In fact, Stanislavski’s book *My life in Art* is dedicated to “hospitable America as a token and a remembrance from the Moscow Art Theatre which she took so kindly to her heart”.

Redesigning Stanislavski: The Evolution of the Method

Coinciding with the Moscow Art Theatre's New York engagement, on 18 January 1923 Richard Boleslavsky, Polish actor and founding member of Stanislavski's First Studio,¹⁰ began a series of lectures on Stanislavski's techniques at the Princess Theatre. In April of the same year *Theatre Arts Magazine* published an article by Boleslavsky entitled 'The Man and his Methods' in which the author discussed Stanislavski's system of internal realism. In October a further article by Boleslavsky appeared in *Theatre Arts Monthly* entitled 'The First Lesson in Acting'.¹¹ Richard Boleslavsky's role in the introduction of Stanislavski's approach to American theatre, and its subsequent evolution into the Method, is important. Under his initial influence, Stanislavski's techniques would come both to occupy a central position in American theatrical culture and to assume a pivotal role in Western acting instruction.

Resolutely opposed to the Bolshevik regime and unhappy at the extent to which the Soviet government had consolidated control over the arts, Boleslavsky had left the Soviet Union in 1920.¹² After travelling throughout Europe he arrived in America in 1922, opening a revue in October at New York's Booth Theatre the

¹⁰ See Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 490.

¹¹ Over the next nine years, Boleslavsky published a series of interrelated articles, each appearing in *Theatre Arts Monthly* and focusing on the following aspects of actor training: concentration, memory of emotion, dramatic action, characterisation, observation and rhythm. The sum of these articles was published in 1933 in the form of Boleslavsky's book *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1978).

¹² J. W. Roberts, *Richard Boleslavsky: His Life and Work in the Theatre* (Michigan: Ann Arbor UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 79.

same year. In 1923 he served as both assistant and stand-in for the Moscow Art Theatre during their New York engagement and in June founded The Laboratory Theatre. Until its closure in 1930, The Laboratory Theatre played host to around 500 students in all – among them Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman and Stella Adler. Under the auspices of the Group Theatre, such figures would later play a central role in developing the American adaptation of Stanislavski's System. Constituting the first practical and systematic effort to communicate Stanislavski's performance techniques to Western actors, training at The Laboratory Theatre was divided between voice work and classes aimed at broadening the actor's inner creative resources by means of improvisation and observation. Additional instruction was also offered in ballet, eurhythmics and fencing. Designed to educate the actor in the techniques that formed the core of Stanislavski's actor training, Boleslavsky's lectures and articles supplemented the autobiographical and largely anecdotal *My Life in Art* which, published in English in 1924 and affording the actor little in the way of practical instruction, was however the only book by Stanislavski available in America at that time. Stanislavski had revised the book following the American tours (the first Soviet edition was published two years later in 1926) and he was anxious to ensure that foreign language translations were not taken from the English version of the book which he considered too anecdotal and non-theoretical. In 1924, in a letter to Karl Kersten who had asked for his permission to publish a German edition, Stanislavski had explained his reasons thus:

The difference between the two editions is as follows: the first is packed with material which is often of a purely anecdotal nature and was written for an

uninformed public [...] the Russian edition [...] is written with a much more serious reader in mind and will go into artistic problems more deeply.¹³

Boleslavsky's own book, *Acting: The First Six Lessons* was published almost a decade later in 1933. In the absence of any published in-depth guide to the System by Stanislavski, Boleslavsky's study soon became an indispensable handbook for American theatre practitioners, playing a key role in the dissemination of Stanislavski's techniques to America. With chapters on concentration, observation, emotion memory and dramatic action, the book largely reflected the content of his lectures at the Laboratory Theatre:

Threaded through the lessons is Boleslavski's reiterated catechism that acting is a high and exacting art that demands control of the body, the will, the intellect, the emotions, and, crucially, the soul [...]. Boleslavski stressed the actor's spiritual training as the most important part of the work and he developed a series of what he called "soul exercises" in relaxation, concentration, and training the affective memory.¹⁴

Brecht's conception of the role that 'observation' plays in the actor's preparatory work on a part differs significantly from Stanislavski's understanding of the process. The poem 'Rede an dänische Arbeiterschauspieler über die Kunst der Beobachtung' marks the difference in Brecht's idea of actor preparation, to that formulated by Stanislavski (*GBA* 22.2, pp. 860-65). Brecht politicises the act of observation, suggesting that the actor achieves a politically aware perspective by learning to observe *correctly* (this will be discussed further in Chapter 2).

¹³ Jean Benedetti, 'A History of Stanislavski in Translation', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 6, no. 23 (1990), 266-78 (270).

¹⁴ Foster Hirsch, *A Method to their Madness*, pp. 63-64.

A student of “the system as it was developed before 1924”,¹⁵ Boleslavsky focused his early instruction at the Lab upon the importance of ‘emotion memory’, in turn underlining the centrality of the psycho-techniques to the System. Maria Ouspenskaya, a former member of the First Studio who had remained in America after the company’s departure for the USSR, joined him at the Lab in 1924. Like Boleslavsky, who had left the Soviet Union more than a decade before Stanislavski was to begin his work on the role of physical action as the basis of a performance, she too had encountered his theories in their infancy, and her classes in acting technique accordingly reflected her training in ‘emotion memory’ and the introspective techniques. Indeed, Ronald Willis asserts that it was this branch of work which “formed the core of the Lab’s unique training and provides its chief historical significance”.¹⁶ Yet whilst this emphasis on inner performance techniques was undoubtedly responsible for initiating the translation of Stanislavski’s ideas into an American idiom, some regard it as having had the attendant effect of fossilizing “him into the state at which they left him”.¹⁷

By 1926 Boleslavsky had begun to redefine his teaching at the Lab. Once exclusively focused on the importance of ‘emotion memory’ to the actor’s imaginative work on a part, his lectures now began to pay increasing attention to the role of dramatic action and its interrelation with emotion in the creative

¹⁵ Ronald A. Willis, ‘The American Lab Theatre’, *Tulane Drama Review*, 9, no. 1 (Fall 1964), 112-16 (113).

¹⁶ Ronald A. Willis, ‘The American Lab Theatre’, 113.

¹⁷ Theodore Hoffman, ‘Stanislavski Triumphant’, *Tulane Drama Review*, 9, no. 1 (Fall 1964), 9-17 (16).

process. The role represented, as Boleslavsky now put it, the “spine” upon which the “beads of action” were strung – an idea which anticipated “by a number of years a comparable shift of emphasis on Stanislavsky’s part”.¹⁸ Francis Fergusson, a student at the Laboratory Theatre from 1926 to 1930 recalls how: “ ‘Action’ was certainly the word we heard most frequently [...] from Boleslavsky in his rehearsals and informal talks, from Madam in her classes in the technique of acting.”¹⁹ However, the transition in Boleslavsky’s thinking led to conflicting interpretations of the System within American acting instruction and a certain emphasis on the emotional aspect of the Stanislavskian approach – most notably under Lee Strasberg’s teaching at the Group Theatre.

The Theatre Union and the Group Theatre

Whilst there is no reference to Boleslavsky’s teaching or theoretical writings in any of Brecht’s published notes, the influence of his ideas on American left-wing theatre collectives such as the Group Theatre and the Theatre Union, would nonetheless ultimately impact upon Brecht’s own reception of the System and his subsequent notes of the 1930s.²⁰ In 1935, almost twelve years after the Moscow Art Theatre’s American engagement, the Theatre Union began plans to stage Brecht’s adaptation of the Gorki classic, *Mother* – a play which charts the political

¹⁸ J. W. Roberts, *Richard Boleslavsky: His Life and Work in the Theatre*, p. 171.

¹⁹ Francis Fergusson, ‘The Notion of Action’, in Erika Munk (ed.), *Stanislavski and America: An Anthology from the Tulane Drama Review* (Connecticut: Fawcett, 1967), pp. 85-86.

²⁰ Although Brecht’s review of *Don Carlos* printed in *Der Volkswille* on 15 April 1920 indicates that he was at least familiar with Boleslavsky’s film *Le pain* (1918), see *GBA* 21, p. 60.

development of its central figure from passive cynic into an active participant in the struggle against exploitation.

Established in 1933 by Charles and Adelaide Walker, Liston Oak, Manuel Gomez, Sylvia Fenington, Albert Maltz, George Sklar, Paul Peters and Michael Blankfort, the Theatre Union was a small, left-wing professional workers' theatre. Disenchanted with the lack of social and political plays that were being produced by commercial bourgeois theatres on Broadway, the Theatre Union was committed to producing "plays with a progressive, socially-conscious message to as wide an audience as possible".²¹ *Mother* was to be Theatre Union's fifth production and represented a departure from the more conventional forms of drama to which the Theatre was accustomed. In the two years since its inception, the company had staged *Peace on Earth* by George Sklar, *Stevedore* by Paul Peters and George Sklar, *The Sailors of Cattaro* by Friedrich Wolf²² and Albert Maltz's play *The Black Pit*. All were realistic plays which had been produced according to conventional realistic tradition. Indeed, the preferred production style at the Theatre was the method of Stanislavski, albeit filtered through the highly individualised, psychological reading of the System that Lee Strasberg was developing and disseminating at the Group Theatre.

²¹ James. K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 7.

²² The fact that Wolf also tried to get the Theatre Union to stage his 'Aristotelian' play *Professor Mamlock* indicates the company's aesthetic preferences.

Brecht scholarship has neglected to consider the fundamental issue that what Brecht encountered in New York at the hands of the Theatre Union during the 1930s was *not* unadulterated Stanislavskianism, but rather an *interpretation* of the System based on Strasberg's psychological exercises at the Group Theatre. John Willett makes no distinction between Soviet and American versions of the System, even going so far as to use the phrase 'Stanislavsky's "Method"':

It was during the second half of the 1930s that Brecht began to see the rise of Stanislavsky's 'Method' in the USA and USSR alike as a threat to the kind of anti-illusionistic theatre practised by himself and Erwin Piscator. Whether or not he was aware of the impending role of this naturalist revival in the new Soviet orthodoxy [...] he first came to dislike it through his experience of the 'left' theatre in New York.²³

Whilst Werner Hecht has identified the change of emphasis with regard to physical action in the late phases of Stanislavski's work as a key aspect of Brecht's reinterpretation of the System during the 1950s, almost all of the significant critical studies of Brecht and Stanislavski, including those by Hecht, Eddershaw and Morely, are vitiated by a failure to clearly identify the factors which distinguish Strasberg's version of the System from its original conception. This is a crucial oversight which neglects to consider "the Method's hegemony over the interpretation of the System in the West"²⁴ and its implications for Brecht's reception of Stanislavski – a factor to which only Benedetti, himself a Stanislavski scholar, seems to make brief reference:

²³ John Willett, *Brecht in Context* (London: Methuen, rev. edn, 1998), p. 24.

²⁴ Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 6.

While Strasberg was perfectly aware of the major differences between his Method and the Stanislavsky “system”, the rest of the world confused, and continues to confuse, the two – as did Brecht.²⁵

What follows is an examination of the nature in which Stanislavski’s approach was adapted in America by Lee Strasberg and appropriated by workers’ theatres such as the Group Theatre and the Theatre Union – all of which is central to an adequate contextualization and understanding of Brecht’s early reception of the System.

Established in 1931 by Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman and Cheryl Crawford, the Group Theatre was a “permanent company of professional actors united by a common point of view and trained by a single method”²⁶ – that method being Strasberg’s derivative of Stanislavski’s System. Indeed, whilst the Group was committed to socially-relevant theatre, an equally important facet of the company’s work was the systematic development of the art of acting. Under Strasberg’s tutelage actors at the Group Theatre explored inner techniques derived from Stanislavski’s practices. Concentration, relaxation, improvisation and above all the technique of ‘emotion memory’ were central to Strasberg’s work on the actor’s preparatory work on a role. By 1935, Strasberg’s interpretation of the System had begun to evolve into a highly psychological approach which demonstrated a clear bias towards ‘affective memory’, as it would become known in American acting instruction, and Stanislavski’s early work on the use of

²⁵ Jean Benedetti, ‘Brecht, Stanislavsky, and the Art of Acting’, p. 104.

²⁶ Morgan Y. Himmelstein, *Drama was a Weapon: The Left-Wing Theatre in New York, 1929-1941* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 156.

psycho-techniques in actor training.

Based on Stanislavski's technique of 'emotion memory', 'affective memory' is an introspective, preparatory method whereby the actor learns to reproduce an emotion required for a role by recalling a similar feeling from his own experience. In order to locate a 'trigger' for the required feeling, the actor begins by evoking the sensory impressions surrounding a moment in his past when he experienced a similar emotion. Yet Strasberg's use of the technique differs significantly from that propounded by Stanislavski. Whilst Stanislavski recommended that the actor's motivation for a role should always begin from the play itself, the Method actor's sole source of inspiration is recovered experience. Thus Strasberg's technique of 'affective memory' gives precedence to the realisation of the character from recalled emotional material drawn from the actor's own personal life. As Colin Counsell explains, the Strasbergian actor:

brings to the stage a behavioural regime that derives from the performer himself/herself, not from the play-text. It is the actor's emotions, or, more precisely, their extreme expression of them, that shape the character.²⁷

The difference, then, is that whereas Stanislavski's performance technique encourages the actor to create the role from the 'given circumstances' of the play, according to Strasberg's Method the character is fashioned primarily from the actor's *own* emotional reality.²⁸ Moreover, Strasberg's 'affective memory' is, as

²⁷ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 58.

²⁸ This distinction can also be applied to the use of improvisation or études within the Method and the System. Stanislavski uses the French term 'étude' to refer to a non-scripted improvisation on the theme of the play which the actor carries out at rehearsal. However, in keeping with Strasberg's

Counsell suggests, characterised by a heightened emotionalism and a psychological intensity which far exceeds Stanislavski's original conception:

Method performances tend to deal not merely in emotions but in emotions of an extreme kind. In selecting an experience from the past to employ onstage, few actors will choose a moment when they were relatively happy or moderately sad [...]. As a consequence Method performances are usually marked by displays of highly charged feeling, expressions of sublime pleasure, or, more often, trauma and emotional distress.²⁹

The result, as various commentators have pointed out, is that Strasberg's classes often seemed "more like group therapy than performance"³⁰ and subsequently fostered "an introverted form of acting".³¹ For Strasberg, the actor's inability to express feeling was a result of the modern world's conditioning and his exercises were accordingly designed to aid the actor in unblocking his emotions. It is not difficult to see how Strasberg's conception of the psyche as "an inner essence [...] repressed by social conditioning" would have been met with distrust from Brecht, for:

far from being informed by a Marxist, social-determinist perspective [...] Strasberg's view entails a conception of the human subject not as constructed by the social but

psychological reading of Stanislavski's techniques, the Method's appropriation of improvisation is based on the actor's own *experience*, as opposed to the play-text. Whilst Stanislavskian études are based on the 'given circumstances' of the play with the actors assuming their roles as the characters, the Strasbergian use of improvisation involves the actor working "on himself or on a problem which blocked him". Paul Gray, 'Stanislavski and America: A Critical Chronology', *Tulane Drama Review*, 9, no. 2 (Winter 1964), 21-60 (46).

²⁹ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance*, pp. 58-9.

³⁰ David Krasner, 'Strasberg, Adler and Meisner: Method Acting', in Alison Hodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 129-150 (p. 138).

³¹ Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 73.

enchained by it.³²

Composed by Brecht in 1930 (five years before his real introduction to the American derivative of the System at the Theatre Union), an early note entitled ‘Darstellung des Schreckens’, describes an experiential approach to characterisation remarkably similar to the technique of ‘emotion memory’:

Der Schauspieler, um ein Erlebnis zu verschaffen, ein solches reproduzierend, schöpft entweder aus der Erinnerung, indem er ein einstiges Verhalten kopiert oder indem er eine einstige Situation im Geiste wiederherstellt und dann eben einfach reagiert. (Praktisch geht dies so vor, daß er sich in die Illusion setzt – einen Trancezustand –, in dem er die vorgestellte Situation glaubt.) Anders wäre es, wenn er sich nicht an sich sondern an andere erinnerte, also z.B., gälte es etwa, Schrecken darzustellen, den von ihm beobachteten Schrecken anderer aus seinem Gedächtnis schöpfte. Im ersten üblichen Fall überträgt er mit dem Bild des Schreckens auch die Trance auf den Zuschauer [...] im zweiten aber gibt er ein viel komplexeres, eher objektiveres Bild des Schreckens [...]. *Soll der Zuschauer etwas sehen (statt blind etwas zu erleben), so darf der Schauspieler nicht introspektiv arbeiten.* (GBA 21, p. 394)

On re-reading this note in the light of Brecht’s subsequent encounters with the proponents of the Method in America, it is clear just how important an adversary Stanislavski would become within the context of Brecht’s attempts to refine his theoretical system during the latter half of the 1930s (culminating in his ‘Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt’). Whilst it obviously predates such major methodological refocusing on Brecht’s part, ‘Darstellung des Schreckens’ nonetheless indicates how inappropriate, and therefore polemically invaluable, Stanislavski’s introspective techniques such as ‘emotion memory’ could prove to

³² Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance*, pp. 62-63.

be for the Epic Theatre. As his poem 'Rede an dänische Arbeiterschauspieler über die Kunst der Beobachtung', written during 1935, would also show, for Brecht the notion of actor preparation implies something very different from psychological introspection. Unlike the Stanislavskian actor who creates from his own emotional experience, the Epic actor is encouraged to observe from outside and locate the required responses in the socio-historical circumstances of the play. Accordingly his preparation begins with the observation of his everyday surroundings and of his fellow man, thereby transforming the process of observation from a purely introspective, psychological technique into a socially relevant, politicised act.

The emphasis on psychological methodology in Strasberg's reading of the System can be traced back to the means by which the approach was introduced to American practitioners. Prior to the English-language publication of *An Actor Prepares*, Strasberg's understanding of Stanislavski's methods was based upon both the oral transmission of the System from émigré actors such as Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya, the limited theoretical information provided in Stanislavski's own *My Life in Art*, and related secondary literature such as Boleslavsky's *Acting: The First Six Lessons*. Strasberg recalls how the instruction at the Laboratory Theatre had underlined the:

concrete methods or exercises that dealt with the most difficult aspects of the actor's work, such as imagination, emotion or inspiration. [...] The central emphasis in the system set forth by Boleslavsky was on concentration and affective memory. [...] Our exercises with Boleslavsky and Madame were [...] designed to train the actor's imagination.³³

³³ Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), p. 67, p. 69, p. 75.

Strasberg's account and his subsequent selective application of Stanislavski's theories may partly be attributed to his *brief* attendance at the Laboratory Theatre. He had been a student at the Lab for only a few months in 1924 – at a time when the actor's use of 'emotion memory' constituted an integral part of Boleslavsky's lectures. By 1925 – almost a year before Boleslavsky would begin to emphasise the importance of action to the actor's performance technique – he had left to appear in a production at the Theatre Guild. In his own classes at the Group Theatre, Strasberg accordingly placed greatest emphasis on those aspects of the System which related to the psychology of a role – in particular the technique of 'emotion memory' – developing it into the sum and substance of Method teaching in America. For Strasberg, the Group Theatre represented an opportunity to test:

what we had learned from the Stanislavsky system as presented by our own teachers; it was also an attempt to check [...] our ability to use those principles to achieve our own results, without imitating what Stanislavsky and his other followers achieved.³⁴

The means of achieving those results was further conditioned by fashionable cultural preferences, as students, predisposed to interpret the techniques through a popular Freudian filter, emphasised the subconscious aspects of Stanislavski's approach in their modified deployment of the System. Indeed, Boleslavsky's lectures at the Laboratory Theatre on the function of sensory knowledge had underlined Strasberg's own readings in Freud:

Suddenly I knew, "That's it! That's it!" That was the answer I had been searching for. The point is that I had already read Freud and already knew the things that go on

³⁴ Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, p. 93.

in a human being without consciousness. I had already picked up everything Boleslavsky said, but he showed me what it meant.³⁵

With an enthusiasm bordering on religious zeal, Strasberg based his exercises at the Group Theatre almost exclusively around the role of emotion in characterisation. Disparagingly referred to by its detractors as ‘Methodism’, the effect of the Method on the actor was, as Harold Clurman recalls, something of a revelation:

The system [...] represented for most of them the open-sesame of the actor’s art. Here at last was a key to that elusive ingredient on the stage, true emotion. And Strasberg was a fanatic on the subject of emotion [...] when he had succeeded in stimulating it, he husbanded it, fed it, and protected it. Here was something new to most of the actors, something basic, something almost holy. It was revelation in the theatre; and Strasberg was its prophet.³⁶

As Strasberg’s techniques developed into the standard acting approach in the USA – applied and endorsed by other left-wing theatrical collectives such as the Theatre Union – the primacy given to psychological methodology and the technique of ‘affective memory’ at the Group Theatre would ensure the evolution of the Method into a highly emotional performance practice.

³⁵ Robert H. Hethmon (ed.), *Strasberg at the Actor’s Studio: Tape-Recorded Sessions* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1991), p. 145. Carnicke confirms the fact that popular interest in Freud in the United States made the introspective aspects of Stanislavski’s System most appealing: “students at the American Laboratory Theatre seized actively upon these, and paid less attention to other issues, such as action. [...] In short Boleslavsky’s students listened selectively” *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 57. In contrast, there is no evidence of any Freudian influence in Stanislavski’s methodology.

³⁶ Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the Thirties* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), pp. 44-45.

Yet whilst ‘affective memory’ and the psycho-techniques formed the core of the American derivative of the System, by the 1930s Stanislavski had begun to explore the ‘method of physical action’ – an external approach to characterisation which would see a significant shift away from emotion as the basis of a performance. His work of this period is characterised by exercises that explore the idea of conveying the inner life of a role by means of a logical line of physical action. Representing an alternative line of approach from the introspective techniques of ‘emotion memory’ and ‘the ‘magic *If*’, Stanislavski’s ‘method of physical action’ focuses upon the externalisation of emotion and the expression of the inner life of the character in physical terms by means of an accurate and truthful scheme of action:

You prepare with logic and consistency a simple, accessible line for the physical being of your role, and, as a result you suddenly feel inside yourself the life of the human spirit [...]. Following that action, whatever is accessible to your feelings at that time will naturally emerge, in harmony with your body.³⁷

When Stanislavski’s book *An Actor Prepares* was published in America in 1936 it justified the bias towards the psychology of acting and the overindulgence in emotional performance techniques that had become a characteristic of the *mediated* co-option of the System in the USA. Based on Stanislavski’s work between 1908 and 1914, *An Actor Prepares* reflects the System at a particular stage in its development. Published five years after the foundation of the Group Theatre, Stanislavski’s book, with its emphasis on ‘emotion memory’ and the psycho-techniques, served to reinforce both Lee Strasberg’s own emotion-based

³⁷ Constantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, p. 241 and p. 245.

reading of the System and the psychological substance of the actor training sessions which were taking place at the Theatre Union under the guidance of Group Theatre alumni. Although published in English some thirteen years apart, *An Actor Prepares* and *Building A Character* represent the two halves of Stanislavski's integrated study of the actor's technique that were initially intended for publication as one book. However, constrained by both the sheer quantity of material and financial necessity, Stanislavski was reluctantly obliged to publish the book in English in two volumes. The first, *An Actor Prepares*, explored the actor's internal preparation for the role, whilst *Building A Character*, the second half – published posthumously – was to reflect Stanislavski's subsequent examination of the external embodiment of the character. *An Actor Prepares* appeared in English in 1936, two years prior to the Russian version, which carried the title *Rabota aktera nad soboi, Chast' I* (*An Actor's Work on Himself, Part 1: Experience*). Unlike that of its English counterpart, the title of the Russian version indicates its status as *a part* within Stanislavski's larger plans for a progressive examination of the actor's art. Moreover, as Sharon M. Carnicke points out, the modification from the title of the Russian edition: *An Actor's Work on Himself, Part 1*, to *An Actor Prepares*, “subtly supports this emphasis on the internal work of the actor over the external physicalization of the role”.³⁸ Likewise significant is the fact that the Russian edition contains a preface, omitted in the English-language version, which leaves the reader in no doubt as to the position of *An*

³⁸ Sharon M. Carnicke, ‘*An Actor Prepares/Rabota aktera nad soboi, Chast' I*: A Comparison of the English with the Russian Stanislavsky’, *Theatre Journal*, 36, no. 4 (December 1984), 481-94 (490).

Actor's Work on Himself as one component in Stanislavski's systematic study of interdependent facets of the System. Indeed, the foreword also serves to render the 'method of physical action' a more logical progression than is otherwise clear from the English-language publication of the books:

The already published book, *My Life in Art*, is the *first* volume, appearing as the introduction to this undertaking.

The current book, concerning "*work on the self*" in the creative process of "*experiencing*", is the *second* volume.

In the near future I am starting the composition of a third volume, which will discuss "*work on the self*" in the creative process of "*embodying*."

The *fourth* volume I will devote to the "*work on the role*."³⁹

As Burnet M. Hobgood explains, in contrast to readers of the English-language version, the Russian reader would "have been alerted by the preface to expect other aspects of the system in succeeding books" and could thus have been less inclined to place undue emphasis on any one aspect of the approach.⁴⁰ Likewise, Elena Polyakova, an ex-student of Stanislavski, states that the inclusion of the preface in the Russian edition:

emphasised that this, the first stage of an extensive undertaking, dealt only with 'the creative process of experiencing a role'; a later volume would explore 'the creative process of role-realization'; a book on characterisation would follow and there would also be a drill-manual.⁴¹

The preface also indicates an attempt by Stanislavski, accused of idealism and criticised on account of the System's emphasis on the subconscious and the

³⁹ 'Stanislavski's Preface to *An Actor Prepares*', trans. by Burnet M. Hobgood, *Theatre Journal*, 43, no. 21 (May 1991), 229-32 (229).

⁴⁰ Burnet M. Hobgood, 'Stanislavski's Preface to *An Actor Prepares* and the Persona of Tortsov', *Theatre Journal*, 43, no. 21 (May 1991), 219-28 (223).

⁴¹ Elena Polyakova, *Stanislavsky* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), p. 361.

imagination, to convince his Soviet critics that the introspective psycho-techniques belonged to a “distant time, the pre-war period (1907-14)” and that his work was now focused on the role of physical action. Both the lengthy interval between the publication of each volume and the absence of any indication in *An Actor Prepares* as to its intended place in a *progressive* study of the actor’s technique consequently led to the System’s misconstruing in the West and the assumption, particularly in American theatre, that the book represented the complete and definitive account of Stanislavski’s proposals:

An Actor Prepares reads as so definitive that you’re a little shocked to find, in *Building a Character*, [...] Tortsov changing the accent of his teachings, stressing vocal and physical exercises (“external” work) rather than the psychological (“internal”) preparation he preached with unswerving conviction in *An Actor Prepares*.⁴²

Identified exclusively with the introspective techniques outlined in *An Actor Prepares*, the coherence of the envisaged total System and its stress on the interdependence of action and emotion was thus difficult to discern. Neither *Building A Character*, which was not published until 1949, nor:

any subsequent publication had a comparable impact because Strasberg’s version of the American Method was already in place. The discussion of emotion and memory in ‘An Actor Prepares’ is thus of unparalleled importance as a foundation of Method acting, and this emphasis on emotion lent support to Strasberg’s work on affective memory.⁴³

⁴² Steve Vineberg, *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), p. 4.

⁴³ Marla Carlson, ‘Acting and Answerability’, in David Krasner (ed.), *Method Acting Reconsidered*, pp. 81-95 (p. 83).

Guided by both the training he had received at the Laboratory Theatre and the effect of American cultural assumptions and expectations, Strasberg emphasised the psychological in his classes at the Group Theatre, expounding and developing concepts which, contrary to the information afforded by available publications, Stanislavski had already begun to modify. Whilst Strasberg did not deny the importance of action in characterisation, he was concerned to establish that it comes into play *only once* the actor has applied the technique of 'affective memory':

after the actor has been trained to respond and to experience [...]. A play is a sequence of various kinds of action. These in turn derive from the given circumstances of the scene, that is, those events and experiences which motivate the actor to do what he comes on stage to achieve.⁴⁴

Strasberg's selective development and interpretation of Stanislavski's techniques altered very little over the years that followed, not even in reaction to Stella Adler's report that the Soviet theoretician had revised his System to establish physical action as the actor's point of entry into the character.

Adler had joined the Laboratory Theatre in 1925 – at a time when Boleslavsky had begun refocusing his teachings towards the importance of dramatic action. At the Group Theatre she was unable to reconcile Strasberg's emphasis on 'affective memory' with her own understanding of Stanislavski's approach. For her the author's intention, the 'given circumstances' of the play and, most importantly, emotion, should all be embodied in the action. In 1934, Adler met and rehearsed with Stanislavski in Paris and the Soviet theoretician explained

⁴⁴ Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, p. 78.



his modifications to the System and the importance of physical action to the actor's work on a character. As Harold Clurman, her then husband recalls, Adler "had been worried for three years over certain aspects of the Stanislavsky system or method. She no longer found any joy in acting, she avowed; perhaps this was due to that cursed method".⁴⁵ Adler informed Stanislavski during her sessions with him that:

in using the Method I had stopped enjoying acting, and he said, 'If my System doesn't help you, don't use it...but perhaps you're not using it correctly.' [...] At this point in his work he no longer emphasised affective memory. Instead he concentrated on the given circumstances supplied by the playwright. He wanted to take the actor deeper into the play rather than into himself. And he stressed what he called the method of physical actions [...]. He led me to use the physical stage, the physical circumstances. We did exercises to make it clear – to help me *use* the circumstances of the play.⁴⁶

As Adler would later explain, the 'method of physical action' had superseded the technique of 'emotion memory' as the Stanislavskian actor's orientation point of a role:

It's polluted water, and yet Americans, typically, continue to drink it. Stanislavski himself went beyond it [...] the affective memory belonged to the older, worn-out ideas. But Lee always thought it was the cornerstone of the Method.⁴⁷

Brecht would meet Adler the following year during his stay in New York for the production of *Mother*. Together they rehearsed a scene from *Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*. Surprisingly Baxandall makes no reference to Brecht's work with Adler in his study on 'Brecht in America, 1935',⁴⁸ whilst Lyon glosses

⁴⁵ Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years*, p. 138.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Foster Hirsch, *A Method to their Madness*, p. 79.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Foster Hirsch, *A Method to their Madness*, pp. 78-79.

⁴⁸ Lee Baxandall, 'Brecht in America, 1935', *Tulane Drama Review*, 12, no. 1 (1967), 69-87.

over their meeting, describing it as an “encounter where Brecht met and failed to recognise a potential adversary”.⁴⁹ Although Brecht does not refer to their work together in either his journal or notes, within the context of his reception of Stanislavski during the 1930s the encounter arguably represents rather more than, as Lyon suggests, merely a missed opportunity. Significantly the episode raises the possibility that Brecht might have been more aware of the Soviet director’s later preoccupation with the role of action in performance than any of his Stanislavski commentaries of the late 1930s would indicate – suggesting a deliberately *selective* reception of the System on his part. To acknowledge any common interest would surely have weakened the theoretical justification for an alternative theatrical approach.

Brecht also worked with Lee Strasberg during his trip to New York, after he was approached by the Group Theatre to rehearse some of the scenes from his play *Die Maßnahme*. Like his meeting with Adler, the encounter represents an important episode in Brecht’s introduction to the American interpretation of the System and yet, surprisingly, neither Baxandall nor Lyon make any reference to the rehearsals. On the contrary, Lyon states instead that Brecht “was probably not aware that the Group Theatre was using and promoting the principles of Stanislavski acting”⁵⁰ – an unlikely claim given Brecht’s work with *both* Stella Adler *and* Lee Strasberg whilst in America.

⁴⁹ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, p. 18.

⁵⁰ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, p. 19.

The rehearsals took place in Strasberg's apartment over the Al Jolson Theatre – the very place in which the Moscow Art Theatre had launched their American tour some twelve years earlier. Given that they were recognized for their exploration and development of Stanislavskian methodology, Brecht's austere anti-illusionist play seems an unlikely choice for Strasberg's ensemble, representing, perhaps even more so than in the case of *Die Mutter*, "ein Stück von bisher unbekanntem Typus". Even more unexpected, however, is the letter Brecht wrote to Strasberg in January 1936, in which he expressed his enthusiasm for their rehearsals together:

I had the impression that we worked very well together [...]. The few rehearsals with you and your group have at least shown me that a revolutionary pedagogic theatre is possible here too. I owe you many thanks and I beg you to express my thanks to the actors too. (GBA 28, p. 544)⁵¹

Similarly surprising is Strasberg's assertion that Brecht's collaboration with the Group Theatre represented a direct indication of his "positive reaction to both Stanislavsky and the Method".⁵² Strasberg's own account of the rehearsals goes some way in explaining what at first appears to be a considerable theoretical about-turn on Brecht's behalf. Highlighting the fact that these were not typical

⁵¹ An altogether more characteristic response to the empathic acting approach practised by Strasberg's company is revealed in 'Über die Krise der Einfühlung', a note presumably written by Brecht at the beginning of 1936. Whilst acknowledging the "nicht unbeträchtliche soziale Auswirkungen" of such productions as Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*, premiered by the Group Theatre on 26th March 1935 at New York's Belasco Theatre, Brecht nonetheless expressed his disappointment at their ultimate dependence on 'Einfühlung': "Sie hielten jedoch, in der einen oder andern Form [...] im allgemeinen an der Einfühlung fest [...] und es scheint erlaubt, zu fragen, ob nicht dadurch die gewisse Beschränkungen der Tiefenwirkung dieser Aufführung [...], die befürchtet werden muß, zu erklären ist" (GBA 22.1, p. 170).

⁵² Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, p. 195.

Group Theatre rehearsals, but rather the exploration of a new style requiring “a different kind of expression”,⁵³ it seems that every effort was made by the actors to approach the *Die Maßnahme* in a manner that, whilst true to the nature of the piece, was however hitherto unfamiliar to them. As Lee Strasberg recalls:

I explained that [...] Mr. Brecht did not wish the actor to be absorbed with the experience of that part at the moment, but that he desired the kind of reality that one has after something has happened and we describe it to someone.

Since no reference is made to the technique of ‘affective memory’ central to Strasberg’s development of the Method, or indeed any other premise of Stanislavskian theatre, it would appear from Strasberg’s account that the sessions were more an examination of Brechtian technique than anything else. Indeed, following his failure to convey what he considered “necessary for saving the theatre [...] from [the] bourgeois drug traffic and emotions racket” (*GBA* 28, p. 544), it is likely that Brecht was heartened to discover a group of performers who, in the midst of the rampant commercialism of American theatre, at least seemed willing to take note of his ideas. Yet given Strasberg’s rather inaccurate description of the technique of ‘Verfremdung’ as a means of conveying a certain *emotion* to the audience (which may explain his ability to reconcile the approaches so comfortably in retrospect), it is inconceivable that Brecht’s work with the Group Theatre did not provide him with some insight into the psychological type of performance technique that was being developed there:

⁵³ Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, p. 195.

I tried to suggest to the Group Theatre that what Brecht meant by distancing was a way of communicating a feeling to the audience without necessarily indulging in the same intensity of experience demanded in plays with a psychological emphasis.⁵⁴

Considered in tandem, the work of Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler represents a more complete overview of the interdependent components comprising Stanislavski's system. However, examined in isolation, Strasberg's instruction, like that of Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya before him, is, as Paul Mann points out, defined solely by principles which represented a *particular phase* in Stanislavski's development of the System:

ideas brought over by Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya [...] came into the Group, where men began to teach what was most comprehensible to them. They developed only that part of the technique which they understood [...]. Consequently, teachers over here over-emphasized sense memory [...] to the exclusion of everything else.⁵⁵

Under Strasberg's influence the System developed into an emotionally empathic and intensely self-referential approach which would go on to influence Western attitudes to acting, looping "back to Europe through an American filter"⁵⁶ known as the Method.

Profoundly influencing the methods taught to actors at the Theatre Union, it

⁵⁴ Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, p. 194.

⁵⁵ Richard Schechner, 'Theory and Practice: An Interview with Paul Mann', *Tulane Drama Review*, 9, no. 2 (Winter 1964), 84-96 (85). Likewise Sanford Meisner: "We are Americans. We are not nineteenth century Russians. We create from ourselves and from our world [...]. The creative teacher in America finds his own style, that is to say his own method, as indeed every artist must." Paul Gray, 'The Reality of Doing: Interviews with Vera Soloviova, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner', *TDR*, 9, no. 1 (Fall 1964), 136-55 (140).

⁵⁶ Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 6.

is this strand of Stanislavskian training that would shape Brecht's initial reception of the System. Emulating the work of the Group Theatre, the Theatre Union had set up an experimental Studio in 1934 which offered actors the opportunity to attend workshops and training classes that explored the technique of acting. The approach taught in these classes was the method of Stanislavski, as developed by Lee Strasberg. Centred on the inner, psychological techniques of actor preparation their working methods demonstrated a shift from agit-prop towards a more conventional Stanislavski-influenced theatre approach:

Having abandoned the crude, naïve, stylised cartoons of the old agit-prop plays in favour of plays in the traditional Ibsenite mould, the radical theatre now fervently advocated Stanislavski's approach to acting as the method which best complements the subtle content of the plays.⁵⁷

As a large amount of the instruction at the Studio was focused on developing characterisation in conjunction with the productions at the Theatre Union, improvisation exercises were explored extensively as a means of enabling actors to develop their roles. Actors applied the techniques they learnt in the Studio with an almost religious dedication, comparable to that fostered by the Group Theatre:

Improvisations were set in workers' homes, bureaucrats' offices, strike meetings, war scenes and concentration camps. During the run of [George Sklar's] 'Peace on Earth', for example, all the actors in the Studio were told to behave as if they were in a concentration camp. They became so involved in the exercise that when a stagehand walked in on them they all responded to him as if he were a guard [...].

⁵⁷ Mark Wolf Weisstuch, *The Theatre Union, 1933-1937: A History*. PhD thesis, City University of New York, 1982 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1988), pp. 181-82.

The group believed in the method as if it were one of the revelations at Sinai and assiduously applied it to every phase of their work.⁵⁸

Reflected in both its choice of production style and teaching personnel, the influence of the Group on the Theatre Union was considerable, indicating, once more, that what Brecht encountered at the latter was essentially a *mediated* version of Stanislavski's System. Clifford Odets, a former member of the Group Theatre, was appointed director of the Theatre Union Studio, Sanford Meisner, at that time a principal actor at the Group, led classes there from time to time and Molly Thatcher, a supporter of Strasberg's teaching and former member of the Group Theatre, also taught at the Studio. Having worked with Lee Strasberg and Harold Clurman at the Group Theatre, Odets was committed to Strasberg's work developed from Stanislavski's actor training methods. In his classes Clifford Odets examined "such basic precepts of the method as 'affective memory', sense memory and improvisation".⁵⁹ Sylvia Fenington became director at the Studio after Odets left. Like Odets, Fenington had also formerly been a member of the Group Theatre where, as Mark Wolf Weisstuch points out, she had:

immersed herself in the tenets of Stanislavsky's system of acting under the tutelage of Lee Strasberg and Harold Clurman [...]. Fenington could give the Theatre Union organisers valuable advice on matters of theatrical practice.⁶⁰

In their work at the Theatre Union Studio, Odets and Fenington experimented extensively in turn with the improvisation and psychological characterisation methods that Strasberg was developing in his training classes at the Group

⁵⁸ Mark Wolf Weisstuch, *The Theatre Union*, pp. 183-84.

⁵⁹ Mark Wolf Weisstuch, *The Theatre Union*, p. 181.

⁶⁰ Mark Wolf Weisstuch, *The Theatre Union*, pp. 45-46. Weisstuch states that Fenington joined the Group Theatre in 1931, and appeared in two of the Group's first season of productions – *1931* and *Night over Taos*, both by Clair and Paul Stifton.

Theatre. Accordingly, the approach taught at the Theatre Union likewise represented an *adaptation* of the early techniques which comprised Stanislavski's methodology from the pre-1914 period.

CHAPTER 2

RESISTING THE SYSTEM: BRECHT'S RECEPTION OF STANISLAVSKI DURING THE 1930s

Die Mutter and the Method

Having already set his sights on America as a potential place of exile, Brecht was attracted by the Theatre Union's proposal for a production of his play.¹ Left-wing theatre had a good reputation in the USA and was considered a legitimate force in American theatre. A letter to Maxim Gorki written after the production in December 1935 goes some way in explaining why Brecht might have placed such high hopes in the Theatre Union, calling the company "das einzige ständige Arbeitertheater New Yorks" (*GBA* 28, p. 539). As a left-wing workers' theatre the Theatre Union was committed to producing socially relevant plays. Yet whilst Brecht shared their aspirations for a socially critical, political theatre, he would discover that the Theatre Union was far removed from "the proletarian cooperative [he] had enthused about to Gorky [...] and its procedures and dramaturgical principles hardly made it the 'apparatus' that [he] would ideally have chosen".²

¹ See James K. Lyon and John B. Fuegi, 'Bertolt Brecht', in John Spalek and J. Strelka (eds), *Deutsche Exilliteratur seit 1933*, Vol. 1 (Bern: Franke, 1976) pp. 268-98 (p. 269).

² John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, pp. 81-82.

Keen, just as Stanislavski had been twelve years earlier, to secure an audience for his theatre in America, and having agreed in principle to an American production of *Die Mutter*, Brecht was dismayed to receive an English version of his play which, adapted by Paul Peters, amounted to a politically naïve and ahistorical misreading that resulted in vulgar determinism. Outraged at the adaptation Brecht wrote to Peters at the end of August 1935 stating:

Ich hatte mir meinerseits große Mühe gegeben, Naturalismen zu vermeiden, weil es mir schien, daß die Arbeiterbewegung große und einfache Formen braucht. Ich fürchte immer, das Milieu zu übermächtig werden zu lassen, weil dann die Art, wie die Personen handeln, vom Zuschauer immer aus dem Milieu heraus erklärt wird und das subjektive Moment, richtiges oder falsches politisches Verhalten, unter den Tisch fällt. [...] Sicher sind sie ungehalten darüber, daß ich mit einer naturalistischen Aufführung des Stückes [...] nicht einverstanden bin. Aber ich glaube eben, daß es [...] nur an der Art der Aufführung liegt, ob man ein nichtnaturalistisches Stück von der Art der »Mutter« vor Arbeitern aufführen kann oder nicht. Auch in Berlin war dies ein Wagnis, und in Berlin gelang es. (GBA 28, pp. 520-21)

In his account of the *Mother* debacle, Lyon tends to characterise Brecht's dispute with the Theatre Union as largely a clash of styles.³ Yet such an interpretation fails to take into account the strongest charges that Brecht makes against the Theatre. As the pre-production correspondence illustrates, Brecht's criticism of the adaptation carries a far more potent, *political* charge, than the stylistic disagreements which would ensue following his arrival in New York. Brecht accused Peters of producing a version of the play which presented history non-dialectically and resulted in an essentialist emphasis on eternal values and behaviour. In a letter to Victor Jerome (cultural commissioner of the agitprop division of the Communist Party in America) dated the beginning of September

³ James. K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, p. 7.

1935, Brecht maintained that Peters' adaptation was not politically interventionist enough to adequately promote social insight:

Sie kommen daher, daß das Theater ohne mein Wissen eine völlige Umarbeitung, und zwar unglücklicherweise eine den Stil völlig ändernde naturalistische, hat anfertigen lassen [...]. Der politische Inhalt des Stückes kann in einer anderen Form nicht voll herauskommen; dachte ich anders, dann hätte ich selber eine andere Form gewählt. [...] Die Adaptation, die mir vorliegt, [...] zeigt nicht besonders amerikanisches, sondern besonders naturalistisches Gepräge. Sie ist ziemlich genau das, was damals auch in Berlin gewünscht wurde und als einzig wirkungsvoll und verständlich für das Publikum galt. Gegen die Form des Originalstücks machten sich auch in Berlin vor der Aufführung genug Einwände und Widerstände geltend. Die Aufnehmer der Aufführung zeigt jedoch, daß die Arbeiter [...] die Herausarbeitung der großen politischen Linie, den Verzicht auf liebevolle Milieumalerei, den Verzicht auf den Plot alten Stils durchaus verstanden. Die Arbeiter reagierten beinahe auf jeden Satz und die Diskussion nach der Aufführung war eine politische. (GBA 28, pp. 522-23)

Such anachronistic forms, he argued, were, ideologically speaking, unsuitable for the theatre of the modern age:

Die alte naturalistische Spielerei hängt mir ganz einfach zum Halse heraus. Das paßt für Petroleumfunzeln, aber nicht für elektrisches Licht. Mir kommt es vor, als wären in der Adaptation vor ein Auto wieder Pferde gespannt worden, weil der Anlaßschlüssel nicht gefunden werden konnte. Kurz ich will das nicht machen. Dann warte ich lieber. – Wenn die Theater Union die »Mutter« aufführen will, dann soll sie, gerade weil sie ein Arbeitertheater ist, die richtige Original »Mutter« aufführen. (GBA 28, p. 523)

Brecht's claim that Peters' adaptation represented a return "zu älteren Prinzipien" of "theatrical Naturalism" (GBA 24, p. 164) is essentially politically motivated, the full ideological import of which becomes clear if one looks at the charges of political ineffectuality brought to bear against historical Naturalism in the essay 'Über experimentelles Theater'. Here Naturalism is declared synonymous with the

reproduction of *surface* reality and the failure to provoke any genuine insight into socio-economic causality:

Die Einblicke in das soziale Getriebe, die das Theater gestattete [waren] nicht besonders tief [...]. Mehr oder weniger war es wirklich, wie eingewandt wurde, eine bloße Symptomatologie der sozialen Oberfläche. Die eigentlichen gesellschaftlichen Gesetzmäßigkeiten wurden nicht sichtbar. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 543)

In order to clarify his position, Brecht informed Peters that he would be willing to travel to New York to assist at the rehearsals (*GBA* 28, p. 520). In a letter dated 29 August 1935 the Theatre Union replied to Brecht, citing financial reasons for their reluctance to fund his passage to America. Instead the letter expressed the company's willingness for Brecht to assist at rehearsals, on the condition that any such undertaking would be at his own expense. First, however, the Theatre Union was concerned to clarify that theirs was a fundamentally different production style:

On the matter of your directing with us here in America, there are certain problems which we are anxious for you to understand fully. We have our own company, our own method of work, and we have already engaged our director. It is very important for you to understand that we have a different tradition from that in Europe.⁴

In a letter dated 4 September 1935, Peters wrote to Brecht personally, rejecting the claim that he had created a "completely naturalistic version" of *Die Mutter*.⁵ Defending his adaptation, Peters justified the alterations he had made as an attempt to rectify what he considered a lack of consistency and logical

⁴ James K. Lyon, 'Der Briefwechsel zwischen Bertolt Brecht und der New Yorker Theatre Union von 1935', *Brecht Jahrbuch* (Milwaukee, WI, 1975), pp. 136-155 (p. 138).

⁵ James K. Lyon, 'Der Briefwechsel', p. 139.

development in Brecht's original version. Whereas Brecht's play was simply divided into ten scenes, Peters had grouped the scenes into three acts, or, as he put it, "three stages of growth".⁶ According to Peters, the development of the dramatic line of action was clear and consistent in the first 'third' of Brecht's version, demonstrating the growth of the central character towards her first direct political action:

In the first five scenes the mother is drawn, always resisting, into the movement – mainly to protect her son. Here the growth is logical and straight, one scene leading to the next, and all building to the first direct voluntary action of the mother when she lifts the flag from Smilgin's hand.⁷

The second 'third' of Brecht's play, whilst "somewhat less logical in development", was, Peters' maintained, nonetheless clearly defined by both the relationship between the mother and son and their dedication to the Party:

In the second group of scenes, from scene 6 through scene 9, the mother begins to learn and prepare herself for active party work [...]. This group [...] has the constant tie of the relationship between the mother and son – and »die dritte Sache«. ⁸

However, overlooking the fact that Brecht had written the play as a series of largely self-contained episodes, Peters considered that the last 'third' of the play – from scene ten onwards – neglected the logical development of the relationship between mother and son in favour of a series of unconnected agitation scenes:

Here we all felt [...] a lack of clear and logical development. The political situation develops chronologically, it is true; but this is reflected in a series of scenes which do not grow one from the other [...]. Disregarding all question of style of drama, there is no growth here as in the first or second series of scenes. This is why we felt the play stopped and became somewhat lost in this section.⁹

⁶ James K. Lyon, 'Der Briefwechsel', p. 141.

⁷ James K. Lyon, 'Der Briefwechsel', p. 141.

⁸ James K. Lyon, 'Der Briefwechsel', p. 141.

⁹ James K. Lyon, 'Der Briefwechsel', p. 141.

Peters' comments clearly demonstrate an unawareness of the Epic Theatre's use of montage of independent incidents to demonstrate a process – the “Jede Szene für sich” formulation proposed in the ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper »Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny«’ (GBA 24, p. 79). On the contrary, in an attempt to “construct a new growth based on further political development and the relationship between Pavel, his mother, and their common agitation work in the war”¹⁰, Peters had reverted to Gorki's original text for material. Addressing what he considered the dramatic inconsistency of the last third of the play, Peters had written three additional scenes in order to reinforce the line of action and further develop the relationship between mother and son central to Gorki's novel. Peters also inserted some naturalistic dialogue between Pelagea Wlassowa and Pavel in the opening scene of the play “to aid our workers, who do not know Gorki, to grasp the background of the play”, and also in the second scene at the point of the workers' entrance. Here the aim was, he stated, similarly to introduce to the audience “what to us are foreign names and a completely foreign situation”.¹¹

In its new adaptation the play had become a sentimental “Mutter-Sohn-Stück” (GBA 28, p. 527) which, relying on the emotional value of events rather than their historicized depiction, frustrated both the political import of the play and the theatre's capacity as an instrument of social change. On the contrary, Brecht's aim in writing *Die Mutter* had been to encourage the audience to adopt an

¹⁰ James K. Lyon, ‘Der Briefwechsel’, p. 141.

¹¹ James K. Lyon, ‘Der Briefwechsel’, p. 140.

essentially critical attitude, fundamentally different from what they were already accustomed to:

Diese bedient sich der *hingebenden Einfühlung* des Zuschauers keineswegs so unbedenklich wie die aristotelische und steht auch zu gewissen psychischen Wirkungen, wie etwa der Katharsis, wesentlich anders. So wie sie nicht darauf ausgeht, ihren Helden der Welt als seinem unentrinnbaren Schicksal auszuliefern, liegt es auch nicht in ihrem Sinn, den Zuschauer einem suggestiven Theatererlebnis auszuliefern. (GBA 24, p. 115)

A comparison of Brecht's opening scene with that translated and adapted by Paul Peters for the Theatre Union, reveals clear discrepancies in both dramatic style and intention:

It is early morning in the kitchen and living room of Pelagea Vlassova. The mother is cooking soup for her son. Pavel enters from the little adjacent room, buttoning his shirt collar. He carries a pamphlet in his hand.

PAVEL: Good morning, mother.

MOTHER: But, Pavel, it's only five o'clock.

PAVEL: I know, Mother. I got up early this morning. I've got some work to do. *He sits down and starts lacing his shoes, meanwhile reading at the pamphlet he has placed on the table.*

MOTHER *looking at him, troubled; then shaking her head*: Work to do! *She goes back to the stove and stirs the soup.* Pavel.

PAVEL *without looking up from his book*: Yes, mother.

MOTHER: I'm almost ashamed to give you this soup for your dinner; it's so thin. But I haven't anything to put in it, Pavel: not a thing in the house. That penny an hour they cut you on your wages last week: that makes such a difference, Pavel. I skimp and save, but somehow I just can't make it up. (GBA 24, p. 164)

The emphasis in Peters' adaptation is clearly on establishing atmosphere and the illusion of a real location, in order that the spectator:

aus Nachlässigkeit und alter Gewohnheit, sich in eine bestimmte Stube versetzte und sich für den unsichtbaren Augenzeugen und Belauscher einer einmaligen intimen Szene hielt. (GBA 24, p. 156)

On the contrary, conspicuously lacking in expository and atmospheric detail, Brecht's opening scene does little to further verisimilitude by means of conventional Naturalism. Indeed, rather than resembling a real location, the stage scenery is limited to "spärlichen Andeutungen von Möbeln, Türen usw" (*GBA* 24, p. 150). Instead the emphasis is on establishing an unsentimental and non-representational style aimed at encouraging the audience to focus their attention on both the 'Fabel' and behaviour of the characters:

Pelagea Wlassowa: Fast schäme ich mich, meinem Sohn diese Suppe hinzustellen. Aber ich kann kein Fett mehr hineintun, nicht einen halben Löffel voll. Denn erst vorige Woche ist ihm von seinem Lohn eine Kopeke pro Stunde abgezogen worden, und das kann ich durch keine Mühe mehr hereinbringen. [...] Wofür esse ich mit, wohne in seiner Stube und kleide mich von seinem Verdienst? Er wird noch weggehen. [...] Ich drehe jede Kopeke dreimal um. Ich versuche es so und versuche es so. Ich spare einmal am Holz und einmal an der Kleidung. Aber es langt nicht. Ich sehe keinen Ausweg. (*GBA* 3, p. 263)

In contrast to the naturalistic conversation between mother and son in Peters' adaptation, the mother's monologue in Brecht's opening scene is delivered directly to the audience. The most striking thing about the language in Brecht's version is its economical simplicity. Stripped to their essentials, the sentences are succinct, functional and articulated "als seien sie eigentlich in der dritten Person verfaßt" (*GBA* 24, p. 156). Character exposition is similarly concise, practical and to the point, and its function in underlining the 'Fabel' is clear: "Was kann ich Pelagea Wlassowa, Witwe eines Arbeiters und Mutter eines Arbeiters, tun?" (*GBA* 3, p. 263) Indeed, a comparison of the opening scenes illustrates that the implications for the actress playing the character of Pelagea Wlassowa in Brecht's scene are fundamentally different to those in Peters' adaptation. By directly

addressing the spectator, the actress dispels the convention according to which she is unaware of their presence. No attempt is made to convince the audience that the actress *is* the character, she does not pretend:

in Wirklichkeit die Wlassowa zu sein oder sich dafür zu halten und diese Sätze in Wirklichkeit zu sagen [...]. Vielmehr stellte sie dem Zuschauer offen die Person vor, die er nunmehr als handelnde und zu behandelnde einige Stunden lang sehen würde.
(GBA 24, p. 156)

In order to limit emotional identification and show the ‘Gesten’ of the character so that they are retained in the spectator’s memory, Brecht recommended that the actor deliver his lines “wie Aussagen vor Gericht” (GBA 24, p. 173). This economic and functional simplicity ensures that the character’s words are articulated in such a way as to ensure that “das auswendig Gelernte am Text” is made apparent in the actor’s presentation of the character – a performance approach that Brecht would develop in ‘Die Straßenszene’ as a direct response to the the hegemony of Stanislavskian identificatory techniques (GBA 22.1, p. 372).

In a letter-poem entitled ‘Brief an das Arbeitertheater Theatre Union in New York, das Stück »Die Mutter« betreffend’, written sometime between August and October, Brecht explained the functional use of language in the play:

Als ich das Stück »Die Mutter« schrieb
Nach dem Buch des Genossen Gorki und vielen
Erzählungen proletarischer Genossen aus ihrem
Täglichen Kampf, schrieb ich es
Ohne allen Umschweif, in kärglicher Sprache
Reinlich die Worte setzend, alle Gesten
Meiner Gestalt sorgsam wählend, wie man
Die Worte und Taten der Großen berichtet. (GBA 24, p. 173)

The poem goes on to consider the alternative, representational style of Peters' adaptation:

Genossen, ich sehe euch
Das kleine Stück lesend, in Verlegenheit.
Die kärgliche Sprache
Scheint euch ärmlich. So wie in diesem Bericht
Drücken sich, sagt ihr, die Leute nicht aus. Ich las
Eure Bearbeitung. Hier fügt ihr ein »Guten Morgen« ein
Dort ein »Hallo, mein Junge«. Den großen Schauplatz
Füllt ihr mit Hausrat. Kohlgeruch
Kommt vom Herd. (GBA 24, p. 176)

Brecht's 'Brief an ...' rejects the dependency on the audience's 'Mitgefühl' which is ensured by the Theatre Union's exploitation of the figure of Wlassowa as a *literal* mother. Instead, the poem signals *another* kind of emotional response. The mother is offered up to the audience "zur Nacheiferung" – her transformation into a revolutionary figure representing an example worthy of imitation:

Für meine Aufgabe hielt ich es, von einer großen historischen
Gestalt zu berichten:
Dem unbekannten Vorkämpfer der Menschheit.
Zur Nacheiferung. (GBA 24, p. 173)

The audience's unconstructive sympathy with a bereaved mother (which is encouraged by the placement of Pawel's death at the end of the Theatre Union's adaptation, as opposed to Scene 11 in Brecht's play) is contrasted with a preferable 'Bewunderung' at Wlassowa's development into a politically-conscious being, resulting in the urge to follow her example:¹²

Statt um Bewunderung
Werbt ihr um Mitgefühl mit der Mutter, die ihren Sohn verliert.
Den Tod des Sohnes
Legt ihr schlau an den Schluß. So nur, denkt ihr, wird der Zuschauer

¹² John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, p. 149.

Sein Interesse bewahren, bis der Vorhang fällt. Wie der Geschäftsmann
Geld investiert in einen Betrieb, so meint ihr, investiert der Zuschauer
Gefühl in den Helden: er will es wieder herausbekommen
Und zwar verdoppelt. (GBA 24, p. 176)

By the time the poem reappeared in *Theaterarbeit* some seventeen years later its role as a model of how *not* to produce a work of Epic Theatre was clear. Yet even in the context of the Theatre Union's production of *Mother* the poem's explanatory function is evident through its description of the original 1932 staging of the play in Berlin:

Wenige Andeutungen
Zeigten die Schauplätze an. Einige Tische und Stühle
Das Unentbehrlichste genügte schon. Aber die Photographien
Der großen Gegner waren projiziert auf die Tafeln des Hintergrunds
Und die Aussprüche der sozialistischen Klassiker
Umgaben, aufgemalt auf Tücher oder projiziert auf die Tafeln. (GBA 24,
p. 175)

The poem is didactic and its stance predominantly constructive. Indeed, the tone of the poem explains Brecht's decision to include it in the 1938 Malik edition of *Gesammelte Werke* where, detached from the immediate context of the Theatre Union production, it functions as a statement on the ideological intention of the play aimed at preventing its further misappropriation. Despite the fact that Brecht was dealing with proponents of Stanislavski's illusionistic approach, his concern in 'Brief an ...' is not criticism but clarification. Aware that, as fellow socialists, the Theatre Union shared his interest in socially-critical, political theatre Brecht gently urges the members of the company to re-examine the play's original concept, indicating his wish that they might still be persuaded of the advantages of an epic approach:

So auch führten wir das Stück auf wie einen Bericht aus großer Zeit
Nicht weniger golden im Licht vieler Lampen, als die
Königlichen Stücke früherer Zeiten aufgeführt wurden
Nicht weniger heiter und lustig, maßvoll
In den traurigen Dingen. Vor reinliche Leinwand
Traten die Spieler, einfach mit den charakteristischen
Gesten ihrer Szenen, ihre Sätze
Genau bringend, verbürgte Worte. Jeglichen Satzes Wirkung
Wurde abgewartet und aufgedeckt. (GBA 24, pp. 174-5)

Brecht's use of the honorific 'Genossen' in the poem suggests that his doubts did not lie with the company's political credentials, but rather with their preferred methods of production. The tone of the poem is both encouraging and instructive – Brecht uses the familiar 'Ihr' as a form of address throughout, inviting the Theatre Union to consider the means by which *Die Mutter* had first been presented to audiences in Berlin:

Aber die proletarischen Zuschauer
Der ersten Aufführung vermißten den Sohn am Schluß nicht.
Ihr Interesse hielt an. Und nicht aus Roheit.
Und auch damals fragten uns etliche:
Wird der Arbeiter euch auch verstehen? Wird er verzichten
Auf das gewohnte Rauschgift; die Teilnahme im Geiste
An fremder Empörung, an dem Aufstieg der anderen; auf all die Illusion
Die ihn aufpeitscht für zwei Stunden und erschöpfter zurückläßt
Erfüllt mit vager Erinnerung und vagerer Hoffnung? (GBA 24, p. 176)

Brecht would increasingly come to identify the metaphors of dependence and emotional intoxication articulated in the poem with the methods propounded by Stanislavski in the commentaries composed during the latter-half of the 1930s following his experiences with the American proponents of the System (GBA 22.1, pp. 279-86). Such refocusing on Brecht's part would illustrate how much

sharper his own theoretical arsenal becomes, in polemical terms, once he has identified Stanislavski as a specific adversary.

Whilst Brecht continued to contest the suitability of the adaptation, and as further correspondence proved fruitless, Manuel Gomez of the Theatre Union was dispatched to Denmark at the beginning of October to negotiate a compromise. The outcome was a somewhat reluctant invitation for Brecht to assist at the rehearsals. Arriving in New York in October 1935 and joined by Hanns Eisler (who had been lecturing at the New School for Social Research), Brecht found himself in an artistic climate largely informed by a mimetic approach to acting derived from Stanislavski's dramaturgical procedures and very different from that envisaged in 'Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater?' Unwilling to accept a production of the play on other than his own terms or theories of stage production, Brecht discovered that, in addition to his objections to what he considered Peters' politically naive misreading of the play, his theoretical objectives were technically at odds with the Stanislavskian performance practices of the Theatre Union. Colin Counsell has explored the association between an ahistorical vision of the human subject and the notion that Stanislavski's System is centred on the essentialist exploration of eternal values and universal human nature:

The function of art for humanism is to express what is universal [...] to all people regardless of cultural, social or historical differences, so prompting for the viewer a recognition of our shared humanity. [...] The humanistic System aims to evoke what is universal to humankind, seeks to depict those facets of existence which, [Stanislavski] asserts, are common to all. [...] Stanislavski's System redefines all indications of class and epoch as signs of individuality, mobilising them within a

discourse of the humanist subject [...] whereas Brecht desired the character to be seen as *authored-by* society.¹³

Though the outcome would be a resounding artistic failure, the experience at the Theatre Union would be invaluable in providing Brecht with a further weapon in his polemical arsenal: a link between empathy's adverse effect on the audience's awareness of the causal nexus of events, and the essentialism of Stanislavski's theatre in its suppression of social differences.

As George Sklar, a member of the Theatre Union's production committee, recalls, Paul Peters had endeavoured to modify *Die Mutter* along orthodox lines both in an attempt to stay faithful to the emotional cadence of Gorki's original novel and in order to meet the needs of the new, Stanislavskian-inspired performance methodology:

Nothing that Peters had developed in his very warm and eminently actable scenes pleased him. He hated all of it. [...] Gorki's simple story, very human, very warm, needed that kind of simple, human developed scene treatment. And Brecht was so enchanted with his theories of non-involvement that he'd cut off a scene as soon as he felt the audience might get involved. [...] The Theatre Union wanted a responsive audience, not a frustrated one.¹⁴

Moving away from the epic structure of Brecht's version, Peters' realistic adaptation fostered a through-line of action and encouraged empathic involvement – the possibility, as Manuel Gomez (a Theatre Union board member at the time) recalls, of “some kind of identification of prospective audience and stage characters”¹⁵ – thus rendering it the perfect vehicle for Stanislavskian performance

¹³ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance*, pp. 26-29 and p. 88.

¹⁴ Lee Baxandall, 'Brecht in America, 1935', *Tulane Drama Review*, 12, no. 1 (1967), 69-87 (75).

¹⁵ Lee Baxandall, 'Brecht in America, 1935', 71.

techniques. In line with the new approach, Peters' adaptation emphasised the emotional value of events. George Sklar confirms this point, stating that the adaptation was aimed at arousing the audience's identification with the characters on stage and thereby limited any:

abrupt changes of mood and style and [...] insufficient dramatization of personal scenes – all deliberate and part and parcel of Brecht's "Epic" approach to non-involvement, suspension of emotion.¹⁶

Brecht's 'epic' innovations proved impenetrable for the majority of those involved in the production. Wolfson was baffled by Brecht's insistence on using a half-curtain, protesting that the scene changes would be visible to the members of the audience seated in the balconies. Michael Gordon, a young director at the Theatre Union at that time, recalls showing Brecht a picture of an enthralled audience taken from the stage, to which he is reported to have responded: "Look at them. They're intoxicated! It's disgusting. How can you teach them anything?"¹⁷ In being reduced to the status of eyewitnesses of uniquely private events, the audience had become what Brecht had most sought to avoid – a collective which could only be reached through its emotions. Influenced by Strasberg's derivative version of Stanislavski's System, very few of the actors at the Theatre had any notion of Brecht's techniques, nor, as Frederic Ewen points out:

was the company, competent as it might prove itself in other plays, capable of establishing the "estrangement" demanded by the author [...]. Brecht, Eisler, and the

¹⁶ Lee Baxandall, 'Brecht in America, 1935', 71.

¹⁷ Jay Williams, *Stage Left* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p. 181.

Epic Theatre were ranged against naturalism and the Stanislavski *method* of the Theatre Union. [Emphasis mine]¹⁸

Ewen's reference to "the Stanislavski method of the Theatre Union" is however misleading in that it makes no distinction between Soviet and American versions of the System. Equating the Theatre Union's production approach, which was developing under the influence of Lee Strasberg's work on the American Method, with an unmitigated appropriation of Stanislavski's System, Ewen's statement reinforces the misconception that the two were synonymous. On the contrary, what Brecht witnessed at the Theatre Union was not an unadulterated deployment of Stanislavski's System, but essentially an *adaptation* of the Soviet approach *based on Strasberg's psychologically insistent teachings*. In fact, here was a group of actors who, as Benedetti points out, "claimed to use the Stanislavsky 'system' but saw his [Brecht's] play merely as an excuse to explore their own feelings. His words had to be cut where necessary and changed to suit their "personality".¹⁹

An adherent of Stanislavski's methods, the director Victor Wolfson found it extremely difficult to come to terms with Brecht's Epic Theatre and the unorthodox approach it required. Indeed, in an interview with Hans Bunge more than thirty years later, Eisler recalled Wolfson as "ein siebzehntklassiger Imitator des großen Stanislavski – aber ohne dessen Talent".²⁰ As he informed the Theatre Union in a letter dated 15th November, Brecht considered the production "eine

¹⁸ Frederick Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, his Art and his Times* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), p. 316.

¹⁹ Jean Benedetti, 'Brecht, Stanislavsky, and the Art of Acting', p. 103.

²⁰ Hans Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Hanns Eisler im Gespräch* (Munich: Rogner & Bernard, 1970), p. 100.

üble, technisch unzulängliche [...] in vielen Teilen dilettantische” affair which had only succeeded in stifling the play’s Marxist message. Ignoring Brecht’s direction and practical advice, Wolfson “hat in letzter Zeit [...] sich selbstständig gemacht”, ultimately exhibiting “eine grobe Unkenntnis des Stils und des politischen Inhalts” of his original play (*GBA* 28, p. 533). The indiscriminate use of emotional performance techniques prevented the material from being adequately ‘historisiert’, resulting in a psychologised reading of the play. Thus, rather than being presented as historical episodes, the portrayal of events tended towards sentimentality – indeed, in a letter written little more than two weeks before the premiere of *The Mother*, Brecht complained to Helene Weigel that it had still not been decided “wie sie sein wird” (*GBA* 28, p. 529). In the ‘Anmerkungen zur »Mutter«’ Brecht summed up the paradox between *his* vision for the production and that of Wolfson:

Das proletarische Theater muß [...] verstehen, den künstlerischen und politischen Argumenten Gehör zu geben, und darf nicht dem Regisseur Gelegenheit verschaffen, sich individuell »auszudrücken« [...]. Die Regieführung muß vor allem *historischen Blick* haben. (*GBA* 24, pp. 172-73) [Emphasis mine]

Brecht demanded the removal of the three scenes that Peters had inserted into the English version of the play, as well as the naturalistic conversation between the mother and Pavel in the first scene, and the introductions which Peters had added to the workers’ entrance in scene two. In terms of production style, Wolfson was reluctantly persuaded to accept the Brechtian conventions of exposed stage lighting equipment and projections – both of which had been used in the first production of *Die Mutter* in Berlin – with the aim of counteracting

illusion. Restricting the spectator's habitual and "mechanisches Mitgehen" with the events on stage, projected pictures and titles had been employed to verbalise the action and emphasise the historical character of the drama. The implementation of such devices was crucial in limiting the audience's emotional involvement and arousing a critical, cognitive response – thereby rendering "die *Wirkung mittelbar*" (GBA 24, p. 116). In the 'Anmerkungen zur »Dreigroschenoper«' Brecht had explained the significance of projections and their role in the 'Literarisierung des Theaters' and the advancement of a new style of acting which is not exclusively aimed at captivating the audience:

Die Literarisierung bedeutet das Durchsetzen des »Gestalteten« mit »Formuliertem« [...] [die Tafel] erzwingen und ermöglichen [...] vom Schauspieler einen neuen Stil. Dieser Stil ist der *epische Stil*. Beim Ablesen der Tafelprojektionen nimmt der Zuschauer die Haltung des Rauchend-Beobachtens ein. Durch eine solche Haltung erzwingt er ohne weiteres ein besseres und anständigeres Spiel, denn es ist aussichtslos, einen rauchenden Mann, der also hinlänglich mit sich selbst beschäftigt ist, »in den Bann ziehen« zu wollen [...]. Der Schauspieler müßte jene Vorgänge, die durch die Titel schon angezeigt, also ihrer stofflichen Sensation schon beraubt sind, ganz anders auffällig machen. (GBA 24, pp. 58-59)

Punctuating the narrative, the use of projections on stage prevents the illusion of a fourth wall. Urged to think beyond the confines of the play's world, the spectator is thus prevented from identifying with the characters:

Die Bühne zeigte also nicht nur in Andeutungen wirkliche Räume, sondern auch durch Texte und Bilddokumente die große geistige Bewegung, in der die Vorgänge sich abspielten. Die Projektionen sind keineswegs einfache mechanische Hilfsmittel im Sinne von Ergänzungen, keine Eselsbrücken; sie nehmen keine Hilfsstellung für den Zuschauer ein, sondern Gegenstellung: sie vereiteln seine totale Einfühlung, unterbrechen sein mechanisches Mitgehen. (GBA 24, p. 151)

As Counsell points out, such devices signal the play's artifice by facilitating an alternate interpretive discourse to that of the onstage action. Commentating on

events from outside, scene-titles and projections offer the audience “commentary from beyond the limits, and the interpretive logic, of the locus”, or the play’s world. Tension is therefore created between:

a view of the action from within the playworld and a view from without, an ideologically determined ‘experience’ versus a social analysis. In this way individual acts are posed against their socio-historical context, each discourse informing the other.²¹

Besides using slides and projections on stage in the original Berlin production, Brecht had also ensured that the lighting apparatus was visible to the audience. The use of “sehr viel Licht” on the stage was, as Brecht had stressed in an earlier letter to Paul Peters, vital in dispelling illusion and ensuring that “die Figuren, umgeben von Schriften und projizierten Photographien, außerordentlich plastisch hervortraten” (*GBA* 28, p. 528). In the production at the Theatre Union, however, lighting ‘tricks’ appropriate to a theatre founded on illusion were, he contended, still being applied with the aim of increasing atmosphere and verisimilitude – to suggest a *real* location:

Auf einer desillusionierenden Bühne wurden die Beleuchtungstricks der Illusionsbühne vorgeführt: es gab stimmungsvolle Oktoberabendbeleuchtungen zwischen diesen ganz andere Wirkungen anstrebenden einfachen Wänden und Apparaten. (*GBA* 24, p. 171)

Brecht was similarly dissatisfied with use of costume in the production. In an article intended for publication in the left-wing weekly newspaper *New Masses*²², Brecht referred to the Theatre Union’s effort to make the costumes as

²¹ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance*, pp. 100-01.

²² Although an English translation of the article exists it was never published in *New Masses*.

authentic as possible – “die im letzten Augenblick vorgenommene Russifizierung der Kostüme” – as:

eine politisch bedenkliche Operation, weil dadurch ein Bilderbucheindruck entstand und die Tätigkeit der revolutionären Arbeiter einen exotischen und lokalen Anstrich bekam. (*GBA* 24, p. 171)

On the contrary, in order to prevent the revolutionary cause being perceived as a specifically Russian affair rooted to a particular period and thus confining the material to an exact place and time, in the original production of the play “alles Russische war in Kostüm [...] vermieden” (*GBA* 24, p. 110).

Distinguishing himself from the rest his colleagues, Max Gorelik, the set designer for *Mother*, was the only member of the Theatre Union to prove receptive to Brecht’s ideas and yet, as Brecht later complained in the article written for *New Masses*, Gorelik was given little opportunity by the director to participate constructively in the production:

Wir haben uns sehr gewundert über die geringen Möglichkeiten, die der ausgezeichnete Bühnenbauer hatte, seine Intentionen zu verwirklichen. Er wurde nicht für die Arrangements, die Stellungen der Schauspieler herangezogen und er hatte nichts zu den Kostümen zu sagen [...]. Sogar die Beleuchtung wurde ohne ihn vorgenommen. Seine Konstruktion zeigt offen den Lampenapparat und den musikalischen Apparat. Da aber die Klaviere während der Musikstücke nicht beleuchtet wurden, hatte man nur den Eindruck, es sei für sie lediglich kein Platz anderswo vorhanden gewesen. (*GBA* 24, p. 171)

In an article published in *Theatre Arts Monthly* some 22 years later, Gorelik, who had also worked alongside Strasberg at the Group Theatre, (a factor which again suggests that Brecht may have been more aware of the status of Strasberg’s Method, as a derivative of Stanislavskian methodology, than his subsequent criticism of the System implies) recalled Brecht’s disappointment that the Theatre

Union had turned his play “not only into English, but into suspenseful, saccharine trash”.²³ Brecht established a friendship with Gorelik, which would endure well past his brief sojourn in New York.²⁴ In the meantime, however, the irreconcilable discrepancies between his own type of theatre and that envisaged by the director, Victor Wolfson, were becoming increasingly clear to Brecht.

In a letter addressed to the Theatre Union dated 9 November 1935, Brecht voiced strong objections concerning what he considered the:

dilettantische Entstellung einer Arbeit, die unter meinem Namen öffentlich herausgebracht werden soll [...]. Es ist aber unverantwortliche Disziplinlosigkeit, mir bei der unter den gegebenen Bedingungen ohnehin sehr schwierigen Einstudierung eines Stückes von einem hier unbekannten Typus ständig mit Erwägungen dazwischen zu kommen, die einer völlig anderen Vorstellung von Dramatik entstammen. (*GBA* 28, pp. 531-32)

Following one of many stylistic arguments with Wolfson – in which, contrary to the director’s intentions of sustaining stage illusion, Brecht had insisted that the Chorus should address the song “Steh auf, die Partei ist in Gefahr!” directly to the audience rather than to Pelagea Wlassowa – Brecht and Eisler were finally excluded from attending any further rehearsals. Brecht refers to the disagreement

²³ Mordecai Gorelik, ‘Brecht: I am the Einstein of the New Stage Form’, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 41, no.3 (1957), 72-73, 86-87 (72).

²⁴ Mordecai Gorelik was clearly a vital element in Brecht’s attempts to find an audience for his theatre in America. However, a journal entry from 12 June 1944 reveals Brecht’s reservations regarding Gorelik’s apparent recourse to a Stanislavskian approach: “[Ich] sagte Gorelik, daß er sich verändert habe, und gab ihm ein paar Thesen. Wieder kam er mit “ein Drama braucht Spannung, climax und identification,” er könne nicht verstehen, wenn er sich nicht einfühle. Ich sprach gegen eine Wand, als ich auseinandersetzte, wie wenig durch Einfühlung in einen Betroffenen zu verstehen ist. Er kann von dem Interesse am “to sell the story” nicht weggebracht werden. Und am Verkauf von shocks und Emotionen” (*GBA* 27, p. 191).

with Wolfson in the 'Anmerkungen zur »Mutter«'. Instead of placing the chorus "auf der Seite der Musikapparatur oder hinter der Szene", Wolfson had the singers burst into the room "wo die Mutter krank lag, und diese mit heftigen Gebärden auffordern, der Partei zu Hilfe zu kommen". Rather than acting as a summons with the power of raising the sick, Brecht insisted that the song had been used by Wolfson to illustrate "das Ausdembettjagen einer kranken alten Frau" (*GBA* 24, p. 171). According to Brecht the change had the effect of altering the entire political import of the scene: "Aus dem Zustreben des einzelnen zu seiner Partei in der Stunde der Gefahr wurde ein Rohheitsakt" (*GBA* 24, p. 171). It was at this point that Wolfson decided to use Peters' original adaptation, which although containing "some of Brecht's theatre ideas and parts of his text",²⁵ was nonetheless closer to Gorki's original novel in both structure and emotional cadence. In a 'Memorandum über die Verstümmelung und Entstellung des Textes' written three days after the premiere of *Mother*, Brecht expressed his regret concerning what he termed the regrettable 'mutilation' of the play – a consequence of the Theatre Union's decision to omit certain parts. Among the most significant alterations made to the work from an ideological point of view were the elimination of the entire anti-war propaganda scene (scene 13) and the omission of an anti-religious speech by Pelagea Wlassowa in scene 10. As Brecht points out in the memorandum, ideologically this speech represents the main point of the scene in which Wlassowa is shown attempting to dissuade her neighbours from a blind trust in religion and in man's powerlessness against Fate. In the context of Brecht's efforts to introduce a new style of representation to American

²⁵ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, p. 9.

audiences, Wlassowa's speech is of added dramaturgical significance, underpinning her words in the concluding scene of the play: "Das Sichere ist nicht sicher / So, wie es ist, bleibt es nicht". The implication is that effective Marxist theatre has to be Epic Theatre. Concerned to ensure that human nature should not be presented as essentialist nor the hero as the victim of inexorable destiny, Brecht had been similarly careful not to render the spectator prey to a non-dialectical theatrical experience. Indeed, the association of religious fanaticism with the mesmeric function of orthodox theatre is a concern which had already featured in some of Brecht's early notes, and one to which he would increasingly refer with regard to Stanislavski in commentaries written both during, and subsequent to, his New York trip.

Premiered on 19th November 1935 at the Civic Repertory Theatre in New York, the production was generally received by the critics as an amalgam of ideas "pitched somewhere between Brecht's narrative style and Stanislavski's detailed realism".²⁶ Whilst Brecht had continued to defend the integrity of his text throughout the rehearsal period, repeatedly contesting the textual and aesthetic modifications imposed upon the play, he was nonetheless unable to eliminate the naturalistic "Tendenzen im Aufführungsstil" which, under Wolfson's prevailing direction, ultimately permeated the piece (*GBA* 24, p. 169). Almost without exception reviewers deemed the production a commercial and artistic failure. Noting a conflict of style and intention in the play, critics underlined the

²⁶ John Fuegi, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos, According to Plan*, p. 85.

problematic combination of experimental and orthodox, i.e. Stanislavskian, stage forms. Reflecting the general critical opinion, the *New York Times* considered the production little more than “a technically interesting, though emotionally tepid, exercise in stage craft”, lacking in any cumulative power:

the conscious simplicity of the dramatic method turns *Mother* into an animated lecture on the theme of revolution, which may have an educational value but which is desultory theatre. It is a healthy thing to rid the theatre of trickery. But only uncommonly dramatic stories or characters have power enough to live in the theatre without benefit of stage artifice [...]. To this column it is an interesting experiment in stagecraft without much emotional vitality.²⁷

Totally unfamiliar with Brecht's theatre and the role of 'Literarisierung' central to it – the use of devices such as projections, songs and direct address to the audience to inform their understanding of the onstage action and emphasise the didactic aspect of the play – American critics labelled the production both crude and unsophisticated, an “entertainment for children [...] a simple kindergarten for Communist tots”.²⁸ Rejecting Brecht's use of what he termed “große und einfache Formen” within the play, the *New York Evening Journal* likewise dismissed *Mother* as simplistic and naïve:

Their method is as naïve as blackboard, as childish as a set of nursery building blocks. ‘I am Pelagea Vlassowa’ says the old woman, speaking directly to the audience, ‘and I am making soup for my son, a worker. The soup gets thinner and thinner, and he will not like it. He will grow discontented and get into trouble. He reads books’. She might as well have added the significant news that ‘CAT’ spells cat.²⁹

²⁷ Brooks Atkinson, “‘Mother’ Learns and Teaches the Facts of Life”, *New York Times*, 20 November 1935, 26.

²⁸ Arthur Pollock, ‘The Theatre’, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 November 1935. Reprinted in *GBA* 24, p. 179.

²⁹ John Anderson, ‘Premiere of ‘Mother’’, *New York Evening Journal*, 20 November 1935. Reprinted in *GBA* 24, p. 179.

Brecht responded to the charges of simplicity in the 'Anmerkungen zur »Mutter«' which were written following the New York production in conjunction with both the subsequent Copenhagen production and the publication of *Die Mutter* in the 1938 Malik edition of *Gesammelte Werke*:

Man sieht, wie hartnäckig das bürgerliche Publikum auf der prompten Befriedigung ideologischer und nervenmäßiger Bedürfnisse im Theater besteht. Kommt das Theater seiner festgelegten Funktion nicht oder mangelhaft nach, dann hat es eben versagt, ist zu dürftig, primitiv. (GBA 24, p. 179)

Yet it was not only the bourgeois press which were unenthusiastic about the Theater Union's staging of *Mother*. The production was likewise met with little interest from left-wing American critics, who were clearly more accustomed to realistic drama and Stanislavskian production methods:

It is indeed a pity that an organisation which has given us such fine things as the "Sailors of Cattaro" and "The Black Pit" should have been so blinded by its social mission to present such an uninteresting and utterly alien thing as "Mother". [...] The play, if play it can be called, has little interest for any native American audience.³⁰

James T. Farrell, the critic of *Partisan Review and Anvil* was similarly unimpressed by some of the techniques used. Whilst his analysis of the production identified some of the key elements of 'Literarisierung', his criticism nonetheless revealed a total unfamiliarity with the convention. Instead Farrell suggested that the approach was more suited to an audience:

which has not yet emerged from illiteracy. It is over-simplified to the degree that every emphasis which the author seeks to make is made in double and triple. The character will say in an aside what he is going to say or do. Then, they do it.³¹

³⁰ Grenville Vernon, 'Mother', *Commonweal*, 6 December 1935, 162.

³¹ James T. Farrell, 'Theatre Chronicle', *Partisan Review and Anvil*, February 1936, 29.

Noting a clash between Brechtian theatre and the Stanislavskian method of the Theatre Union, the *Daily Worker* detected:

a struggle of two styles, two tendencies in the production. The players in the Theatre Union are used to one kind of technique. Brecht's 'Mother' required a different kind of technique. The production showed quite frequently a lack of unity and style, and this weakened the effect.³²

In the article originally intended for publication in *New Masses*, printed in the 'Anmerkungen zur »Mutter«', Brecht defended the role of 'Vereinfachung' within his theatre. Prefiguring his explanation of the 'Gestus des Zeigens' in 'Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt', such verbalisation of activity was vital, he claimed, in order that the spectator might grasp the attitudes of the characters in terms of their political significance:

Damit das Verhalten der Figuren des Dramen so deutlich gezeigt werden kann, daß der Zuschauer die politische Bedeutung dieses Verhaltens voll erfassen kann, sind einige Vereinfachungen nötig. Aber Einfachheit ist nicht Primitivität. Auf dem epischen Theater ist es durchaus möglich, daß eine Figur sich in aller kürzester Zeit exponiert, indem sie zum Beispiel einfach berichtet: ich bin der Lehrer dieses Dorfes; meine Arbeit ist sehr schwer, da ich zuviel Schüler habe usw. (GBA 24, p. 172)

Brecht and Eisler wrote to the Theatre Union Board on 21 November after the opening of *Mother*, requesting additional rehearsals with a view to restaging the play in a "politisch und artistisch würdige Form" (GBA 28, p. 535). The Theatre Union replied, stating that the request was impossible to grant. The regulations of the Actors Equity Association only permitted one rehearsal a week

³² M. J. Olgin, "Mother": The Theatre Union's New Play', *Daily Worker*, 22 November 1935, 5.

after the play had officially opened and this, they informed Brecht and Eisler, was to be used “to keep the play at its present political and artistic level”.³³ Writing to Piscator the following month, Brecht advised him against any future dealings with so-called left-wing theatres and criticized the general naivety which characterised the American staging of his play:

die »Mutter« ist uns hier sehr verhunzt worden (dumme Verstümmelungen, politische Ahnungslosigkeit, Rückständigkeit aller Art) [...]. Ganz im allgemeinen eine Erfahrung: nur nichts zu tun haben mit den sogenannten linken Theatern. Die sind durch kleine Cliques beherrscht, in denen die Stückeschreiber dominieren, und haben die übelsten Producer-Manieren des Broadway ohne dessen Fachkenntnisse, die nicht sehr hoch sind, aber immerhin. (GBA 28, p. 535)

In a note entitled ‘Über die Verwendung von Musik für ein episches Theater’ composed prior to his departure for America as an introduction to his theatrical concepts and later reworked during his stay, Brecht insisted that the Theatre Union had used the bourgeois theatre apparatus in its production of *Mother* as a tool “zur Herstellung von Rauschwirkungen” (GBA 22.1, p. 161). In processing plays like raw material for public consumption, the apparatus was being used to sustain the spiritual drug traffic of bourgeois show business. The Theatre Union’s conformity to orthodox, ‘Aristotelian’ theatrical approaches was symptomatic of both the apparatus’s general reluctance to adapt its function to other purposes and its tendency to neutralise any form of dramatic innovation. Provocatively *overstating* the similarities between the Theatre Union’s production of *Die Mutter* and Broadway theatre, Brecht commented in a further note that the company had

³³ James K. Lyon, ‘Der Briefwechsel’, pp. 152-3. In the original draft of this letter the sentence continued: “which we regard as satisfactory.” This part of the sentence was however omitted before the letter was sent.

staged his play for commercial gain and in doing so had conducted itself “nicht anders als jedes beliebige Broadwaytheater, das ein Stück einfach als Ware oder als Rohmaterial zu einer leicht verkauften Ware behandelt” (*GBA* 24, p. 141). The implications of the charge derive from the ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper »Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny«’, in which Brecht, calling for a change in the function of the theatre, had described this mercantile type of approach as an obstacle to creative productivity and a barrier to any innovation contrary to the aims of the apparatus. Evaluating plays solely on the basis of their suitability for the capitalist apparatus, the commodification of the theatre had become an impediment to production. Conditioned by the economic factors which sustained its existence, the apparatus only endorsed that which did not pose a threat to its task of providing an evening’s entertainment:

Die Gesellschaft nimmt durch den Apparat auf, was sie braucht, um sich selbst zu reproduzieren. Durchgehen kann also auch nur eine »Neuerung«, welche zur Erneuerung, nicht aber Veränderung der bestehenden Gesellschaft führt – ob nun diese Gesellschaftsform gut oder schlecht ist. (*GBA* 24, p. 75)

Yet despite his obvious overstatement of the similarities between the Theatre Union and other Broadway theatres, it is clear that Brecht interpreted the failure at the Union as symptomatic of the *general* theatre situation in America. According to him, the Theatre Union had not found the courage “alle jene einschneidenden Änderungen in ihrer Produktionsweise vorzunehmen, die nötig waren, [das Stück] zur Wirkung zu bringen” (*GBA* 24, p. 142). Echoing the last lines of the song ‘Lob des Kommunismus’ (“Es ist das Einfache / Das schwer zu machen ist”), which invoke the dilemma faced by the play’s central figure, the

letter poem addressed to the Theatre Union simultaneously highlights their reluctance to experiment with innovative stage forms:

Genossen, die Form der neuen Stücke
Ist neu. Aber warum
Fürchten, was neu ist? Ist es schwer zu machen?
Aber warum fürchten, was neu ist und schwer zu machen?
Für den Ausgebeuteten, immer Getäuschten
Ist auch das Leben ein ständiges Experiment
Der Erwerb einiger Pfennige
Ein unsicheres Unternehmen, das nirgends gelehrt wird.
Warum sollte er das Neue fürchten anstatt das Alte? (GBA 24, pp. 176-77).

Once again the underlying assumption is that genuine Marxist theatre is Epic Theatre, reinforcing the notion that a failure to recognise the advantages of the new approach carries more fundamental, *political* implications. Nonetheless, there is something deliberate and wilful in Brecht's efforts to link the production's lack of success to his notion of the "Warencharakter" of the theatre, as articulated in 'Anmerkungen zur Oper »Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny«'. As a large percentage of the Theatre Union's audiences were in fact "upper-middle-class New York theatre patrons"³⁴ and since the existence of the company relied solely on the financial success of each production, the Theatre Union was to some extent obliged to tailor the style of its output to the taste of its audience – a factor which once again evokes Brecht's notion of the "Lieferantencharakter" and the evaluation of works according to their suitability for the apparatus. Yet, as the poem addressed to the Theatre Union indicates, it seemed that Brecht had anticipated an audience comprising predominantly working-class spectators,

³⁴ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, pp. 6-7.

thereby somewhat overrating the appeal of his experimental style to a significant portion of the company's *actual* audience:

Aber selbst wenn euer Zuschauer, der Arbeiter, zögerte, dann müßtet ihr
Nicht hinter ihm herlaufen, sondern ihm vorangehen
Rasch vorangehen, mit weiten Schritten, seiner endlichen Kraft
Unbedingt vertrauend. (GBA 24, p. 177)

The poem addressed to the Theatre Union has a clear and contemporaneous counterpart in the 'Rede an dänische Arbeiterschauspieler über die Kunst der Beobachtung', composed by Brecht for the Danish Revolutionary Theatre. Established in 1932 by Per Knutzon and Lulu Ziegler, the Revolutionary Theatre was a left-wing, amateur theatre group "die mit kurzen Einlagen, Sketches und Liedern bei Parteiveranstaltungen und Gastspielen auf dem linken akademischen Flügel in Kopenhagen und Umgebung auftraten".³⁵ The company had begun rehearsals of *Die Mutter* in Copenhagen during September 1935 under the direction of Ruth Berlau. As Hans Christian Nørregaard points out, the form of the play was entirely suited to the company. Particularly on account of the montage structure of the scenes:

eignete sich das Stück dafür, in Auszügen gespielt zu werden, so daß die einzelnen Szenen, analog zu den üblichen Sketches des RT, bei Parteiveranstaltungen mit politischen Reden und anderen Einlagen abwechseln konnten.³⁶

³⁵ Hans Christian Nørregaard, 'Bertolt Brecht und Dänemark', in Willy Dähnhardt and Birgit S. Nielsen (eds), *Exil in Dänemark: Deutschsprachige Wissenschaftler, Künstler und Schriftsteller im dänischen Exil nach 1933* (Heide: Westholsteinische Verlagsanstalt Boyens, 1993), pp. 405-62 (p. 417).

³⁶ Hans Christian Nørregaard, 'Bertolt Brecht und Dänemark', p. 420.

Brecht played an active part in the rehearsals and presumably wrote the poem sometime during September, shortly before his departure for New York. Indeed, in the light of Paul Peters' misconceived adaptation of the play for the Theatre Union, which Brecht had recently read and rejected, the poem reflects his concern to avoid the possibility of a similar misreading within the context of the Danish production. Moreover, Brecht's reference to the 'Arbeiterschauspieler' in the title of the poem appears to be an ironic response to the fact that the production in New York had been largely addressed to a middle-class audience. Representing a return to the "alte naturalistische Spielerei", Peters' adaptation appealed to the spectator's empathy and compelled their acceptance of fate. By contrast, the approach used in the original Berlin production of the play had been designed to meet the needs of the spectator who, no longer satisfied with being *passively* transported "aus ihrer engen Welt" by cheap adventures and "den Griff magischer Hände", has begun to think for himself:

Was nützt das, sagen sie
Wenn wir immer aufs neue zu sehen bekommen, wie der dort
Traurig sein kann und die dort herzlos oder was für einen
Bösen König der dahinten abgäbe, was soll dieses
Immerwährende Ausstellen von Grimassen und Agieren
Einiger Leute, die im Griff ihres Schicksals sind?
Lauter Opfer spielt ihr uns vor und tut, als wäret ihr
Hilflose Opfer fremdartiger Mächte und eigener Triebe [...]
Wir aber, die Zuschauer [...]
sitzen verglasten Auges und glotzen [...]
Nein, sagen wir Unzufriedenen auf den niederen Bänken
Genug! Das genügt nicht! (GBA 22.2, p. 861)

The poem highlights the contrast between the passive notion of 'im Griff sein' and Brecht's conception of Epic Theatre as 'eingreifendes Denken'. Furthermore, the

use of the word 'Griff' in the poem also conveys, as Knopf explains, the element of force inherent in conventional empathic theatre:

das Wort »Griff« [...] bezeichnet ein kräftiges Zupacken und wird meist mit Schmerz verbunden. Der Anspruch des Illusionstheaters, zu verzaubern, magisch zu verwandeln, als ob Realität unmittelbar dargestellt würde, wird damit als ein beinahe tätlicher Angriff sowohl auf die Schauspieler [...] als auch auf die Zuschauer.³⁷

In the commentaries written during 1937 (*GBA* 22.1, pp. 279-86) Brecht would explore the notion of coercion in the theatre in association with the indiscriminate use of Stanislavski's identificatory performance techniques.

The 'Rede an dänische Arbeiterschspieler über die Kunst der Beobachtung' is a lesson in the art of observation – a process which, central to any comparison of Brecht and Stanislavski's methods, marks the difference between Brecht's understanding of actor preparation and that propounded by the Soviet practitioner:

Du, der Schauspieler
Mußt vor allen anderen Künsten
Die Kunst der Beobachtung beherrschen
Nicht wie du aussiehst nämlich ist wichtig, sondern
Was du gesehen hast und zeigst. Wissenswert
Ist, was du weißt. (*GBA* 22.2, pp. 862-83)

Unlike the Stanislavskian actor who, as Brecht witnessed in New York, creates exclusively from the reservoir of his own emotional experience, the Epic actor's preparation begins with the observation of his everyday surroundings. As such, the emphasis is on their *political* education, as opposed to their imaginative development as a performer:

³⁷ Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB3*, p. 463.

Also muß eure Schulung beginnen unter den
Lebendigen Menschen. Eure erste Schule
Sei euer Arbeitsplatz, eure Wohnung, euer Stadtviertel,
Sei Straße, Untergrundbahn und Laden. Alle Menschen dort
Sollt ihr beobachten, Fremde, als seien es Bekannte, aber
Bekannte, als seien sie euch fremd. (GBA 22.2, p. 863)

For Brecht the process of ‘Beobachtung’ is not synonymous with emotional introspection – on the contrary, the actor observes from *outside* the world of the play:

Aber Menschenkenntnis erwirbt nicht
Wer nur sich selbst beobachtet. Allzuviel
Verbirgt er selbst vor sich selbst. Und keiner ist
Klüger als er selbst. (GBA 22.2, p. 863)

As Knopf points out, by learning to observe correctly the actor achieves a politically aware perspective: “Beobachtung führt zu Wissen, das Wissen fordert neue Beobachtung heraus, erweitert wiederum das Wissen und so fort”.³⁸ By not assuming that the actor will be socially-focused from the outset, Brecht politicises the act of observation, thereby constructing a theoretical ‘Kontrafaktur’ to Stanislavski’s conception of the process:

Um zu beobachten
Muß man vergleichen lernen. Um zu vergleichen
Muß man schon beobachtet haben. Durch Beobachtung
Wird ein Wissen erzeugt, doch ist Wissen nötig
Zur Beobachtung [...]
Die Kunst der Beobachtung
Angewandt auf die Menschen, ist nur ein Zweig der
Kunst der Menschenbehandlung. Eure Aufgabe, Schauspieler, ist es
Forscher zu sein und Lehrer in der Kunst der Behandlung der Menschen.
(GBA 22.2, p. 864)

³⁸ Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB3*, p. 463.

This type of “paradoxical circularity” is characteristic of Brecht’s thinking on performance approach:

The answer to a question is another question; the end of the interrogation is interrogation. But actors cannot question what they do not notice. They must see the obvious clearly enough to mistrust it.³⁹

Effectively questioning the Stanislavskian notion of ‘given circumstances’, the poem urges the actor to look beyond the surface ‘normality’ of events and human behaviour to uncover the socio-political structures that inform them and which would otherwise remain concealed by a naturalistic, orthodox approach such as that witnessed by Brecht at the Theatre Union. Thus the Brechtian actor’s ideological edification supersedes the Stanislavskian emphasis on the performer’s purely introspective preparation for a role:

Und die Frau dort
Sprach nicht immer so hart, noch ist jene dort
Lieblich zu jedem. Und der herrische Gast
Ist er herrisch nur, ist er nicht auch voll Furcht?
Aber das mutlose Weib, das dem Kind keine Schuhe hat?
Wurden nicht Reiche erobert nur mit dem Rest ihres Mutes?
Seht, sie ist wieder schwanger! Und habt ihr des kranken
Mannes Blick gesehen, als er erfuhr, daß er nicht mehr gesund wird?
Daß er aber gesund würd, wenn er nicht
Arbeiten müßte? (GBA 22.2, p. 863)

Only when the actor has learnt to observe effectively, Brecht asserts, will he be able to begin deconstructing the familiarity of what he has seen, presenting it on stage from an historical standpoint. Thus, preparation itself becomes an act of ‘Verfremdung’:

³⁹ Peter Thompson, ‘Brecht and Actor Training: On whose behalf do we act?’, in Alison Hodge (ed.), *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, pp. 98-112 (p. 104).

Solche sollt ihr genau ansehen. Und jetzt
Stellt euch vor, was um euch herum vorgeht, all diese Kämpfe
So im Bilde ganz wie historische Vorgänge
Denn sollt ihr sie darstellen dann auf der Bühne:
Kampf um den Arbeitsplatz, süße und bittere Gespräche
Zwischen dem Mann und der Frau, Diskussion über Bücher
Verzicht und Auflehnung, Versuch und Mißgeschick
Werdet ihr darstellen dann als historische Vorgänge. (GBA 22.2, p. 864)

Brecht also wrote another poem for the Danish Revolutionary Theatre entitled 'Über alltägliches Theater'. Here he cites the model of a street corner demonstration – a paradigm to which he would later return in detail in 'Die Straßenszene', presenting it as an alternative to the 'Einfühlungstechnik' of orthodox acting methods. The poem illustrates the contrast between the way in which the conventional actor, transforming himself into the character, is required to *inhabit* his role and the Brechtian actor's *presentation* of the character. Preventing the suppression of his own self in the creation of his role, the actor in Brecht's theatre remains a demonstrator. By maintaining an element of distance between himself and the role, the actor is able to *show* the actions of the character:

Und mit Staunen
mögt ihr eines betrachten: daß dieser Nachahmende
Nie sich in einer Nachahmung verliert. Er verwandelt sich
Nie zur Gänze in den, den er nachahmt. Immer
Bleibt er der Zeigende, selbst nicht Verwickelte. Jener
Hat ihn nicht eingeweiht, er
Teilt nicht seine Gefühle
Noch seine Anschauungen. Er weiß von ihm
Nur wenig. In seiner Nachahmung
Entsteht kein Drittes, aus ihm und dem andern
Etwa aus beiden Bestehendes, in dem
Ein Herz schlägt und

The formulation used here is significant in that it indicates a more differentiated consideration of the actor's identification with the character during his imaginative work on a role than that of a broad rejection of 'totale Verwandlung'. Brecht states that the actor must not transform himself totally into the character, "Er verwandelt sich *nie zur Gänze* in den, den er nachahmt" [emphasis mine] – an assertion which implies that the actor will, at some stage, engage in a process of identification with the role. Brecht would return to the question of 'Einfühlung' as a legitimate element of the actor's preparatory work in much greater detail in *Der Messingkauf*. In the meantime, 'Über alltägliches Theater' familiarises us with the type of mystical terminology which, with reference to Stanislavskian stagecraft, would dominate the theoretical notes composed by Brecht following his return from New York. There is no superstition in this theatre, Brecht informs us – on the contrary, the actor shows man as a victim not of the stars, but of his own errors:

Die geheimnisvolle Verwandlung

Die auf euren Theatern angeblich vor sich geht

Zwischen Ankleideraum und Bühne: ein Schauspieler

Verläßt den Ankleideraum, ein König

Betritt die Bühne, jener Zauber

Über den ich die Bühnenarbeiter, Bierflaschen in Händen

So oft habe lachen sehen, passierte hier nicht.

Unser Zeigender an der Straßenecke

Ist kein Schlafwandler, den man nicht anrufen darf. Er ist

Kein Hoher Priester beim Gottesdienst. Jederzeit

Könnt ihr ihn unterbrechen: er antwortet euch

Ganz ruhig und setzt

Wenn ihr mit ihm gesprochen habt, seine Vorführung fort. (GBA 22.2, p. 859)

Following the failed production in New York the dramaturgical poems represent Brecht's concern to avoid a further aesthetic misappropriation of *Die Mutter*. Although the poems precede his analytical draft essays and notes on Stanislavski, they mark a concerted attempt by Brecht to address the issue of *performance technique*. In the light of his experiences with American purveyors of Stanislavski's approach, Brecht's rigorous refocusing on actor methodology would culminate in the major essays of the late 1930s, such 'Die Straßenszene' and, most significantly, the 'Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt'.

In *Theaterarbeit*, published in the GDR in 1951, the first section of Brecht's 'Brief an das Arbeitertheater Theatre Union in New York' was reprinted under the heading 'Die Fabel' alongside photographs of the 1951 Berlin production, to emphasise the importance of on-stage grouping, scenery, lighting and the actor's use of 'gestus' to the 'Fabel' of a play.⁴⁰ Elsewhere in the publication, the productions at the Theatre Union and the Danish Revolutionary Theatre are considered retrospectively alongside one another in a note by Ruth Berlau entitled 'Die Mutter: Berlin 1932 – New York 1935 – Kopenhagen 1935 – Leipzig 1950 – Berlin 1951'. A further stanza from Brecht's verse letter appears in connection with the New York production and is left to speak largely for itself. The only other critical commentary is contained in a couple of lines which accompany one of the photographs from the Theatre Union production and which somewhat wilfully

⁴⁰ Berliner Ensemble and Helene Weigel (eds), *Theaterarbeit: 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles* (Dresden: VVV Dresdner Verlag, 1952) pp. 121-29.

state: “Die geplante naturalistische Inszenierung wurde aufgegeben und der Wunsch des Stückeschreibers nach Benutzung des Modells erfüllt”.⁴¹ However, Berlau’s ensuing comments on the Copenhagen production of *Die Mutter* indicate that, in fact, all did not go to plan during the staging of the play in America. On the contrary, beneath her description of the Copenhagen production one can discern a revealing subtext which conveys what is left unsaid regarding the encounter with the Theatre Union. In Denmark the Danish Revolutionary Theatre had, she states, produced the play from the beginning in accordance with the “Berliner *Mutter*-Modell von 1932” and, in doing so, had succeeded in avoiding “dadurch das Dilettantische”.⁴² The implication is clear – whilst the members of the Theatre Union, and indeed American critics in general, had regarded Brecht’s conception as primitive, Brecht, in turn, dismissed the Theatre Union’s attempts to produce his play according to the preferred Stanislavskian style as resulting in “eine ganze Reihe dilettantischer Anordnungen” (*GBA* 28, p. 533). In contrast, as part of their preparatory work on a character, the actors at the Danish Revolutionary Theatre had studied the photographs from the original production, enabling them to effectively build up a picture of the:

Grundhaltung der Figuren [...]. Keinem fiel die Nachahmung schwer – nichts war ihnen fremd oder primitiv [...]. Sie finden Spaß an dem Modell, denn es ist klar, einfach und mit Gewinn nachzuahmen.⁴³

Although at this point Brecht was presumably largely unfamiliar with the

⁴¹ Berliner Ensemble and Helene Weigel (eds), *Theaterarbeit*, pp. 334-35.

⁴² Berliner Ensemble and Helene Weigel (eds), *Theaterarbeit*, p. 336.

⁴³ Berliner Ensemble and Helene Weigel (eds), *Theaterarbeit*, p. 336.

intricacies of Stanislavski's System, his criticism of *Mother* nonetheless stands as an early, implied attack upon what he *perceived* as the highly introspective and empathic nature of the approach. Brecht's experiences in New York with the American exponents of Stanislavski's System would exert a profound influence on his theoretical notes of the latter half of the 1930s. Rejecting the "emotionalism of actors to which Stanislavski had contributed a new seriousness"⁴⁴, Brecht suggested that the effect of the methodology upon the audience prompted, in Aristotelian terms, a cathartic cleansing of the spectator "von Furcht und Mitleid durch die Nachahmung von furcht- und mitleiderregenden Handlungen" (*GBA* 22.1, p. 171). Indeed, as is made apparent in 'Kritik der »Poetik« des Aristoteles' – one of a series of notes written during 1935, which explore the notion of a non-Aristotelian dramaturgy – Brecht's definition of Aristotelian theatre is not focused on the three unities, but rather on its emotional-psychological effect on the audience. As Knopf points out, Brecht's oft-used term "nichtaristotelisch" refers not to "Aristoteles selbst", but to:

die Hauptquelle der bürgerlichen Kunstauffassung, wonach Theater in erster Linie das Gefühl der Zuschauer ansprechen soll: Ihre Leidenschaften werden durch Furcht und Mitleid »gereinigt«.⁴⁵

The notes were composed in conjunction with the production of *Mother* at the Theatre Union (either during Brecht's stay in New York, or immediately following his return to Denmark), and no doubt represent a direct reaction to his encounter with the American practitioners of Stanislavski's methods. Brecht had

⁴⁴ Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 131.

⁴⁵ Jan Knopf, *Bertolt Brecht* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), p. 84.

deliberately limited any psychological characterisation in *Die Mutter* to a purely “anwendbare, politische” kind which encourages the spectator to mobilise the sum of his experience, aptitude and combative spirit towards a critical evaluation of the characters’ behaviour (*GBA* 24, p. 126). An ‘Aristotelian’ production, Brecht maintained, is one which, in contrast, is *exclusively* aimed at encouraging the spectator’s emotional identification with the characters on stage:

Diese Reinigung erfolgt auf Grund eines eigentümlichen psychischen Aktes, der Einfühlung des Zuschauers in die handelnden Personen, die von den Schauspielern nachgeahmt werden. Wir bezeichnen eine Dramatik als aristotelisch, wenn diese Einfühlung von ihr herbeigeführt wird, ganz gleichgültig, ob unter Benutzung der vom Aristoteles dafür angeführten Regeln oder ohne deren Benutzung. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 171)

Thus, as Frederick Ewen points out:

Brecht was concerned not so much with disputing Aristotle on tragedy, as the interpretations to which Aristotle has been subjected by his successive commentators and the practitioners of drama.⁴⁶

The notes mark a gradual focusing of Brecht’s theoretical polemic against Stanislavski which would culminate in *Der Messingkauf*, where the Soviet theoretician’s approach is identified as the antithesis of Epic Theatre. Indeed, as ‘Fortschrittlichkeit des Stanislawski-Systems’, a note written during 1937 would later illustrate, Brecht perceived the System during this period as an approach consisting almost entirely “aus Vorschlägen, wie die Einfühlung des Zuschauers, seine Identifikation mit Figuren des Stückes, erzwungen werden kann” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 284). The limitation of empathy in the Epic Theatre in favour of more legitimate emotions conducive to rational analysis would see a theoretical re-

⁴⁶ Frederick Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, his Art and his Times*, p. 213.

orientation of Brecht's criticism towards Stanislavski's System.

In November 1935, Victor Jerome interviewed Brecht and Eisler.⁴⁷ Again Brecht's efforts at communicating his ideas for the Epic Theatre seemed lost on his American host, as Jerome vainly endeavoured to grasp Brecht's use of distancing devices within the theatre. In response to Jerome's hypothetical question whether he would compose a play depicting a slave uprising according to his Epic theories or as a naturalistic drama, Brecht dismissed Naturalism as superficial realism stripped of any political purpose:

BRECHT: [...] Ich mag naturalistische Stücke nicht. Ein naturalistisches Stück mit einer Idee (Ideologie) ist eine Perversität. Das naturalistische Stück gleicht einem Klumpen ausgegrabener Erde, einer Materialmenge, Ihren Augen preisgegeben und natürlich untersucht von einem bestimmten Standpunkt aus.⁴⁸

This imagery re-appears in the discussion on 'Naturalismus' in *Der Messingkauf* (by which time Stanislavski is treated as the personification of Naturalism), during which the Dramaturg compares the minute detail of the Soviet practitioner's "naturalistische Werke" to "durch tiefe Spatenstiche gewonnenen Erdklößen, von Botanikern zum Studium auf den Untersuchungstisch gebracht" (*GBA* 22.2, p. 703). The implication is that whilst such productions are out of touch with the theatre of the scientific age, they nonetheless possess some worth in that they "can be dug up and dissected for people to learn from their mistakes".⁴⁹ In a note

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Hauptmann was also present and responsible for transcribing the interview into English.

⁴⁸ Werner Hecht (ed.), *Brecht im Gespräch: Diskussionen, Dialoge, Interviews* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 50-51.

⁴⁹ John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, p. 262.

entitled 'Stil und Natur', presumably written sometime during, or immediately subsequent to, Brecht's stay in New York, the association of Stanislavski with Naturalism is made more explicit. Naturalism, he states, "scheint merkwürdigerweise das tempelhafte Theater Stanislawskis zu verlangen" (*GBA* 22.1, p. 177). The text is one of a collection of notes composed during 1935/36 (the exact date of their origin is uncertain but they bear clear indications of the theatrical insights gained by Brecht in America), which underline Brecht's theoretical position vis-à-vis the prevalence of Stanislavski's methods and his scepticism of a technique aimed at furthering Naturalism in the theatre.⁵⁰

Despite Stanislavski's assertion in *An Actor Prepares* that the importance of "delicate and deep human feelings" to the actor's work should not be confused with the "art of representation" in its reproduction of the surface of life, Brecht repeatedly uses the term 'Naturalism' with reference to Stanislavski.⁵¹ Yet, rather than signifying a literary-historical, period concept, Brecht's comparisons with Naturalism are undertaken to suggest anachronism within dominant, present-day theatre practices, thereby reducing the stature of the Soviet approach and making it seem out of touch with the political theatre of the modern, scientific age. Detlev Schöttker highlights this point, stating that "Stanislawskis Arbeitsweise ist von Brecht seit Mitte der dreißiger Jahre immer wieder als naturalistisch bezeichnet worden". However, he goes on suggest that Brecht formed such assertions in spite of the fact that "er darüber informiert war, daß der russische Regisseur seine

⁵⁰ See *GBA* 22.1, pp. 173-80.

⁵¹ Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 23.

künstlerische Auffassung seit den Anfängen am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts [...] in verschiedenen Stadien weiterentwickelt hat.”⁵² Whilst Schöttker’s statement ignores the fact that, as Brecht had little access to literature detailing the later modifications to the System, his understanding of Stanislavski at that time was very much influenced by the American co-option of the System, it nonetheless links in with the notion of a *selective reception* on Brecht’s part and calls for a more nuanced reading of Brecht’s early critique of Stanislavskian performance technique.

Although markedly milder in tone than those which Brecht would later compose in 1937, the notes from 1935/36 question the type of hypnotic theatre which, as a result of his experiences in New York, Brecht associated with Stanislavskian stage practice at that time, thereby forming the basis for the ‘Auseinandersetzung’ which he would later pursue in earnest with the material written during March 1937. What is more, the notes also reinforce the idea that Brecht’s criticism of Stanislavski’s identificatory approach was dependent on the ‘assumption’ that the American Method represented *unadulterated* Stanislavskianism. In terms which anticipate the later material, in ‘Magie und Aberglaube’ Brecht criticised an antiquated aesthetic, which, geared solely towards compelling the individual’s “restlose Einfühlung” in the stage fiction, represented nothing more than primitive, necromantic nonsense best suited to a museum:

Da ist eine Ästhetik voll von Aberglauben, eine Technik, die aus den Zeughäusern der Magie stammt und in die Museen gehört, eine Kunst, die dem Verstand es

⁵² Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven*, pp. 233-34.

öffentlich und schamlos verwehrt, über ihre Schwelle zu treten. [...] Denn sich einzubilden, man sei ein anderer, als man ist, und dies auch anderen suggieren zu wollen, ist eben Wahnsinn, und gerade dies tun sie, und sie werden um so besser bezahlt, desto besser ihnen der Wahnsinn gelingt. (*GBA 22.1*, p. 177)

Despite the fact that he had found the opposite to be the case at the Theatre Union, such priestcraft was not, he argued, the domain of left-wing theatre practitioners, whose task it was to rid the theatre of mysticism, but rather, as ‘Hypnose und moralische Hemmungen’ points out, that of clerics in cleansing their congregation and rendering them passive (*GBA 22.1*, p. 173). Referring to his negative experiences at the Theatre Union, Brecht remarked that it had not been possible to impart his ideas without making enemies out of the artists he had initially sought to enlighten:

Um mit diesen Künstlern unsern Zweck zu erreichen, müssen wir sie uns zu Feinden machen. Wie schwer ist es schon Dummheiten abzulegen, die uns schaden, aber wieviel schwerer ist es, Dummheiten abzulegen, mit denen wir Erfolg haben? Wir sollen die Vernunft ausbreiten, und wir müssen es mit Hilfe von Leuten tun, die ihren Ehrgeiz darein setzen und einige Techniken mit Mühe und Talent aufgebaut haben, als Wahnsinnige zu erscheinen. (*GBA 22.1*, p. 177)

According to Brecht, the methods applied in “das tempelhafte Theater Stanislawskis” had transformed the interaction between actor and audience into an unproductive affiliation based purely on ‘Mitgefühl’:

Ohne die Stille und Autorität eines Tempels gingen die Darbietungen verloren, da die Selbstverständlichkeit verlorengeht, wenn es nötig ist, erst Interesse zu erregen [...]. Es berührt angenehm, daß man auf der amerikanischen Bühne nicht den Krampf der deutschen findet. Allerdings würde auch kein Schauspieler hier wagen, irgend mehr als sofort Verständliches, unmittelbar Mitfühlbares anzubieten. Leider ist, was das Publikum mitfühlen und sofort verstehen kann, ein flaches Klischee. (‘Stil und Natur’: *GBA 22.1*, p. 177)

Stanislavski himself compares the theatre to a 'temple' in *My Life in Art*: "I dreamed of creating a spiritual order of actors [...] who could worship in the theatre as in a temple" and induce the audience to "shed holy tears""⁵³ Similarly, at the end of a performance, the audience, he states, should be made to feel as if "they were leaving a temple of worship after a prayer".⁵⁴ Stanislavski also uses the term to refer to that special condition of inner creativeness which the actor must strive to attain, "the temple of that spiritual atmosphere in which alone it is possible to create".⁵⁵ Since Brecht's notes predate his request for Margarete Steffin to obtain for him a copy of *My Life in Art* following his return to Denmark (see *GBA* 28, p. 548), it is likely that his reference to "das tempelhafte Theater Stanislawskis" here reflects his dealings with the American reception of the System where Stanislavski's book was very influential.

Whilst by no means calling for the elimination of emotion from the theatre, Brecht declared in 'Thesen über die Aufgabe der Einfühlung in den theatralischen Künsten' that the overriding emphasis on identification, intrinsic to an aesthetic such as that practised by American proponents of Stanislavski's methods, was responsible for the social ineffectiveness of contemporary theatre. Brecht took exception to the persuasive nature of a technique which, being aimed exclusively at arousing the individual's empathy, excluded the possibility of their developing a "kritische, eventuell widersprechende Haltung" towards what was essentially stage

⁵³ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 494 and p. 333.

⁵⁴ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 513.

⁵⁵ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 425.

fiction (*GBA* 22.1, p. 176). Encouraged to think rather than merely ‘experience’, the individual should be deterred from assuming both an unquestioning attitude to the character and an intuitive acceptance of the events portrayed on stage. Rejecting the assumption that a theatrical work of art could only be successfully performed once an empathic response had been provoked, Brecht criticised the tendency of contemporary theatre to limit “den Ausbau seiner Technik auf die Vervollkommnung der Methoden, durch welche eine solche Einfühlung herbeigeführt werden kann” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 175). A technique was required which, by removing the role of empathy from its position of supremacy in the theatre and hence ridding both stage and auditorium of hypnosis and intoxication, would encourage the application of *socially complex* emotions.⁵⁶

Die theatralischen Künste liquidieren damit die Reste des Kultischen, die ihnen noch aus früheren Epochen anhaften, treten aber auch aus dem Stadium, in dem sie die Welt interpretieren halfen, in das Stadium, in dem sie sie verändern helfen. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 176)

In ‘Über die Bezeichnung »restlose Verwandlung«’ and ‘Die nicht restlose Verwandlung ein scheinbarer Rückschritt’ – two further notes written around 1935 and similarly influenced by his introduction to Stanislavskian techniques in America – Brecht questioned the role of identification in contemporary theatre.

⁵⁶ As well as caricaturing Stanislavski, Brecht’s frequent allusions to hypnosis and intoxication derive in part from Marx’s criticism of religion as “das Opium des Volkes” in *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*. Religion acts as an instrument of oppression, stupefying its followers into accepting the immutability of the social order and their place within it. Brecht frequently uses the concept of ‘Rauschwirkung’ in his criticism of bourgeois theatre audiences. In ‘Über die Verwendung von Musik für ein episches Theater’ he states: “Wir sehen ganze Reihen in einen eigentümlichen Rauschzustand versetzter, völlig passiver, in sich versunkener, allem Anschein nach schwer vergifteter Menschen” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 163).

Brecht uses the term ‘restlose Verwandlung’ to satirise that condition of total transformation into the role – “to live and feel the role spiritually” – to which Stanislavski refers in his book *My Life in Art* as the peak of the actor’s artistic creativity.⁵⁷ In describing his work on the role of Dr. Stockman in Ibsen’s play *An Enemy of the People*, Stanislavski explains the actor’s goal of complete transformation into the character:

From the intuition of feelings I passed naturally to the inner image with all its peculiarities and details [...]. And the soul and body of Stockman-Stanislavski became one organically [...]. I felt the greatest joy an artist can feel, the right to speak on the stage the thoughts of another, to surrender myself to the passions of another, to perform another’s actions as if they were my own [...]. One must himself live with the thoughts and feelings of the role and act in concordance with them.⁵⁸

Elsewhere in the book, Stanislavski formulates the process of total transformation thus:

Entering into the life of the play, I see no other way for Rostanov than the way he chose himself. Within the limits of the play I live the life of Rostanov, I think his thoughts, I cease to be myself. I become another [...]. Do you understand this phrase that is magic for the actor, *to become another*?⁵⁹

Although Brecht’s use of the term ‘restlose Verwandlung’ predates his request to Margarete Steffin to obtain for him a copy of *My Life in Art*, it features increasingly throughout the Stanislavski commentaries of 1937.⁶⁰ Whilst the recurrent placement of the phrase in inverted commas implies an external source, it is likely that, rather than representing an *indigenous* term in Stanislavski’s

⁵⁷ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 524.

⁵⁸ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, pp. 376-77.

⁵⁹ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 204. The character to which Stanislavski refers here is Colonel Rostanov from Dostoyevsky’s *The Village of Stepanchikovo*.

⁶⁰ Brecht’s concept of ‘restlose Verwandlung’ will be further discussed later on in this chapter in conjunction with Brecht’s 1937 Stanislavski notes. See pp. 149-50.

theory, like ‘emotion memory’ or the ‘magic *If*’, this is Brecht’s own pejorative expression for the actor’s rebirth into the character. Brecht’s use of the phrase ‘restlose Verwandlung’ is satirically double-edged, suggesting both magic and transubstantiation. The term links the actor’s transformation into the character with the realm of cult, whilst simultaneously implying that the process is concomitant with trickery and illusion and therefore designed to deceive the audience.

The actor’s complete transformation into the part – “theoretisch und mit Exerzitien unterbaut zuletzt von Stanislawski” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 178) – whilst fundamental in initiating the spectator’s own identification with the character, is not, Brecht contested in the first of the two notes, the premise of political theatre.⁶¹ On the contrary:

weiß auch Stanislawski, daß von zivilisiertem Theater erst gesprochen werden kann, wenn die Identifizierung nicht restlos ist: Der Zuschauer bleibt sich immer bewußt, daß er im Theater ist. Die Illusion, die er genießt, ist ihm als solche bewußt. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 179)

Indeed, in terms familiar from the material he would compose in 1937, closely identifying Stanislavski’s approach with theatrical mysticism, in ‘Die nicht restlose Verwandlung ein scheinbarer Rückschritt’ Brecht underlined the primitive (i.e. archaic), “religiöse[n] Funktion” of a theatre which dealt solely in the total “Passivisierung der Gläubigen”:

⁶¹ In fact Brecht would identify the use of the ‘Einfühlungstechnik’ in the process of arousing audience empathy as a fundamentally barbaric operation. See his discussion of Horace’s *Poetics* in ‘Gespräch über die Notigung der Einfühlung’, written in 1953 (*GBA* 23, p. 412).

Nun weiß man, daß die primitiven Religionen wichtige Elemente der Meisterung des Lebens enthielten, in ihrer Magie ganze Techniken entwickelten. In den großen Kunstepochen findet man in den Kunstwerken ebenfalls die Tendenzen zur Meisterung des Lebens. (GBA 22.1, p. 180)

Brecht states that, in keeping with orthodox theatrical assumptions, the actor's artistic ability was measured by his capacity to transform himself into the character, thereby ensuring the spectator's total identification. According to convention, the actor who consciously holds something in reserve, hence not giving himself over entirely to the character, succeeds only in destroying stage illusion. Thus, the actor's *incomplete* transformation is traditionally considered an artistic 'Rückschritt':

Die Fähigkeit der restlosen Verwandlung gilt gerade als das Kennzeichen der Begabung des Schauspielers; mißglückt sie, dann ist alles mißglückt [...]. Etwas Unechtes haftet sogleich dem Spiel an. Der Unterschied zwischen Theater und Wirklichkeit tritt schmerzhaft scharf hervor. (GBA 22.1, pp. 179-80)

It was, Brecht claimed, essentially a question of bringing to bear the insights brought about by the Epic Theatre:

Auch eine Spielweise, welche die Identifizierung des Zuschauers mit dem Schauspieler nicht anstrebt (und welche wir eine epische nennen), ist ihrerseits nicht interessiert an der völligen Ausschließung der Identifizierung [...]. Da es jedoch darauf ankommt, die Unterschiede herauszuarbeiten, ist im folgenden bei der üblichen Spielweise die immer bleibende Reservatio des Zuschauers der Verwandlung gegenüber und bei der epischen Spielweise das bleibende Moment der Verwandlung vernachlässigt. (GBA 2.1, p. 179)

This passage is central to our understanding of the Brecht/Stanslavski relationship, predating a process to which Brecht would return in more differentiated detail in a draft *Messingkauf* essay entitled 'Einfühlung', and again later in 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]', written in the run-up to the 1953 'Stanislawski-

Konferenz'. 'Die nicht restlose Verwandlung ein scheinbarer Rückschritt' does not advocate the total removal of 'Einfühlung' from the theatre – on the contrary, the note presents the Stanislavskian 'Spielweise' as a phase of modern theatre to be overcome. In order for the theatre to progress beyond a total dependency on empathic modes of representation, Brecht suggests that the technique of identification will have to be rethought in the context of the technical advances made by the Epic Theatre:

Es ist für uns, damit wir weiterschreiten können, unbedingt nötig, die restlose Verwandlung als einen positiven, kunstvollen Akt zu erkennen, eine schwierige Sache, ein Vorgehen, durch das die Identifikation des Zuschauers mit der Figur des Stückes ermöglicht wird. Historisch gesehen wurde hier eine neue Annäherung an den Menschen erreicht, eine intimere Kenntnis seiner Natur drückte sich hier aus. Wird dieser Status verlassen, so ist dieses Verlassen keineswegs ein völliges, es wird keineswegs eine Epoche als abwegig einfach durchgestrichen, ihr Arsenal an Kunstmitteln völlig aufgegeben. (GBA 22.1, p. 180)

The later notes attempt to do just that. In theorising a place for 'Einfühlung' as a preparatory performance strategy to be applied at rehearsals, both the draft *Messingkauf* essay and 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]' develop the application of *controlled* identification as just one of a number of rehearsal techniques aimed at creating a theatre of critical distance.

Brecht's early Stanislavski commentaries

The first of Stanislavski's books to appear in German translation was *An Actor Prepares* which was published in 1939 as part of a volume entitled *Das*

Geheimnis des schauspielerischen Erfolges.⁶² In 1936, however, when Brecht returned to Denmark following his stay in America, there were no books by the Soviet practitioner available in German. In February Brecht wrote to his co-worker Margarete Steffin asking her to translate part of Stanislavski's *My Life in Art* for him – seemingly as a matter of some urgency:

Gibt es in Englisch das Buch Stanislawskis über sein System der Schauspielkunst?
Wenn nicht, könntest Du mir daraus übersetzen? Das wäre sehr wichtig. (GBA 28,
p. 548)

The first German edition of *Mein Leben in der Kunst* would not appear until 1951 when it was published in the GDR by Bruno Henschel und Sohn. Significantly, it was the American edition of the book published in 1924 which Stanislavski had denounced as too anecdotal and non-theoretical that Steffin was required to translate. Having evidently familiarised himself with Stanislavski's book, Brecht wrote to Piscator some five months later:

Ich habe Stanislawskis »My Life in Art« mit Neid und Unruhe gelesen. Der Mann hat sein System in Ordnung gebracht und die Folge ist, daß sie in Paris und New York Stanislawski-Schüler werden. Muß das sein? Wir sind wirklich weltfremde Träumer. (GBA 28, p. 557)

Interestingly Brecht uses the term 'System' in a letter which refers, with a certain degree of admiration, to the widespread proliferation of Stanislavski's approach. By contrast, in the ensuing polemical notes, Brecht would at times revert to the term 'Stanislawski-Methode' in his criticism of the approach, perhaps to imply a pejorative association with American performance techniques.

⁶² K.S. Stanislawskij, *Das Geheimnis des schauspielerischen Erfolges*, trans. by Alexandra Meyenburg (Zurich: Scientia-Verlag, 1939/40).

Brecht was justified in his unease. Not only had Stanislavski organised his theories into a structured and coherent system tactically made available in print form, his methods, as Brecht had discovered in New York, had been widely disseminated, attracting, as a consequence, significant academic interest. In the same letter Brecht referred to the keen enthusiasm with which quite a few people in America had received his Epic Theatre:

Ich habe in New York gesehen, mit welcher Gier eine ganze Menge Menschen alles über die neue Technik aufnehmen. Diese Leute merken immer deutlicher, daß sie mit den alten Mitteln und dem kümmerlichen ideologischen Rüstzeug, das sie haben, die neuen Aufgaben nicht mehr lösen können. (GBA 28, p. 558)

It is unlikely that Brecht was referring to either the Theatre Union or to Lee Strasberg and the other exponents of Stanislavski's theories at the Group Theatre, but more likely to an isolated group of artists he met during his stay in New York, which included Mordecai Gorelik, John Houseman and Joseph Losey – director of the Federal Theatre Project's "Living Newspaper" productions. Brecht's failure to effectively promote his ideas for a politically progressive theatre within a country whose culture he had long admired had proven difficult to accept, and he interpreted the encounter at the Theatre Union as indicative of the *overall* situation in America. Piscator had, for some time, been planning the creation of a German-language experimental theatre in Engels, the capital of the Volga German Autonomous Republic. The project was to involve the talents of, among others, Ernst Busch, Carola Neher and Alexander Granach – practitioners distinguished by their work within German left-wing theatrical circles. In danger of being left behind by the likes of Strasberg and the whole Stanislavski School, Brecht welcomed the idea as a potential platform or "Weltmarkt" for his own theatrical

innovations. In a clear allusion to the influence that Stanislavski's performance methodology was exerting upon both Russian and American theatre, Brecht wrote to Piscator of the need to acquire an effective outlet for their ideas:

Den Gedanken, ein großes Experimentaltheater zu machen, in dem wir unsere theatralischen Untersuchungen wieder aufnehmen und weiterführen können, finde ich großartig [...]. Es ist ja grundfalsch, daß wir für unsere Art, Theater und Film aufzufassen, keine Propaganda machen. Wir müßten Artikel schreiben, vielleicht auch eine Broschüre mit Fotos, das ganze riesige Material muß endlich einmal [...] verwendbar gemacht werden. (*GBA* 28, pp. 557-58)

Yet in 1936, barely two years after Zhdanov had institutionalised Socialist Realism at the All-Union Congress of Writers, the repressive cultural climate of the Soviet Union, in which Stanislavski's approach had been promoted to *the* official model of theatrical practice, seemed a highly unlikely choice for Piscator's proposals for a resident experimental theatre. Brecht's visit to Moscow the previous year (which gave rise to both his encounter with Mei Lan-fang and a meeting with Stanislavski) had given him reason to be dubious regarding the prospect of establishing a progressive proletarian theatre: he informed Helene Weigel in a letter written during the middle of March 1935 that the possibilities there were "schwächlich" (*GBA* 28, p. 495). Two months later, in May 1935, Piscator had established the Deutsches Gebietstheater Dnjepropetrovsk as the first stage in his broader plans for a resident German-language theatre in the Soviet Union. Under the direction of Maxim Vallentin, actor and founding member of the German 'Agitproptruppe des Kommunistischen Jugendverbandes', the company toured villages in the Ukraine performing in public meeting-places to the local German-speaking communities. Although the initial productions tended to

espouse the style of Vallentin's previous agitprop outings, the troupe was soon forced to curb its experimentation in favour of a more orthodox line of approach appropriate to Socialist Realist requirements. (Indeed, Vallentin would later establish himself as a leading figure in Stanislavski instruction in the GDR.⁶³) Thus, with the changes in the political-artistic climate in the Soviet Union and the subsequent disappearance and arrest of some of the key figures involved in the Engels project (including Alexander Granach, Carola Neher and Sergei Tretiakov, the last of whom, aesthetically close to Brecht, had been liquidated on a falsified charge of spying for Japan), Piscator's wider plans for a resident theatre were effectively put to an end.

During the latter half of 1936 Brecht composed the essay 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst'. A significantly reworked revision of the earlier 'Bemerkungen über die chinesische Schauspielkunst', 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst' was first published in the British journal *Life and Letters To-day* under the title 'The Fourth Wall of China: An essay on the effect of disillusion in the Chinese Theatre'.⁶⁴ As his theoretical notes of the mid to late 1930s illustrate, Brecht was

⁶³ From 1919 to 1921 Vallentin worked as an actor in Berlin under such directors as Leopold Jeßner and Max Reinhardt. From 1927 to 1932 he was the head of the 'Agitpropgruppe' 'Das Rote Sprachrohr' (part of whose repertoire can be seen in Brecht/Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?*) In 1933 he emigrated from Germany to the Soviet Union. Vallentin returned to Germany in 1945 and two years later established the Deutsches Theater-Institut with Ottofritz Gaillard and Otto Lang. From 1952 he was Intendant at the Maxim-Gorki-Theatre in Berlin.

⁶⁴ 'The Fourth Wall of China: An essay on the effect of disillusion in the Chinese Theatre', trans. Eric Walter White, *Life and Letters To-Day*, 15, no. 6 (1936), 116-23. Reprinted in *GBA* 22.2, pp. 960-68.

increasingly preoccupied with attempts to bring his own theory ‘in Ordnung’ – as an organised approach capable of competing with Stanislavski’s structured System. The essay is noteworthy in that, although Brecht had already used the term ‘Entfremdung’ in the same sense in ‘Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater?’ the previous year, it represents his first detailed, *published* examination of the concept of ‘Verfremdung’ – introduced, rather conveniently, on the back of the then fashionable Chinese approach to acting. The text was inspired by the guest performance given by Mei Lan-fang which Brecht had witnessed during his visit to Moscow in 1935. Brecht also met Stanislavski during the same trip. To honour the end of Mei Lan-fang’s ‘Gastspiel’ in Moscow, a formal discussion took place on 14 April 1935 at which Brecht, Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko (the latter as ‘Gesprächsleiter’) were present.⁶⁵ Seeking to minimise “die bestehenden Antagonismen zwischen dem europäischen Einfühlungstheater und dem chinesischen Theater”⁶⁶, Stanislavski emphasised the significance of empathy to Chinese theatre and the actor’s synthesis with the role, even when portraying characters of the opposite sex – a customary performance practice within oriental theatrical tradition:

Die Höhen der chinesischen Schauspielkunst könnten nur durch Übung und Einfühlung erreicht werden, sagte Dr. Mei und stellte das Prinzip fest, zu dem auch wir, wenngleich auf völlig anderen Wegen, gekommen sind: “Der Schauspieler muß

⁶⁵ The full list of speakers present was as follows: Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, Sergei Tretiakov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Alexander Tairov, Sergei Eisenstein, Gordon Craig, Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Alf Sjöberg and Platon Kerschentsev.

⁶⁶ Sabine Kebir, *Abstieg in den Ruhm: Helene Weigel: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000), p. 142.

sich als die Heldin fühlen, die er darstellt; er muß vergessen, daß er Schauspieler ist und gleichsam mit der Gestalt verschmelzen.”⁶⁷

In contrast, Brecht (who, the protocol notes interestingly, approached the podium “anscheinend widerwillig”) publicly rejected the notion of the actor’s total fusion with the character on stage:

Ich für meinen Teil bin überzeugt davon, daß Zwischenspiel, Unterschied und Widerspruch – und nicht die umfassende Synthese – der Ausgangspunkt der Kunst sein sollen.⁶⁸

The actor’s complete transformation into the role does not take place on the Chinese stage, Brecht contested – on the contrary, the spectator:

sieht [...] in Wirklichkeit nicht weniger als drei Personen gleichzeitig: eine Zeigende und zwei Gezeigte. Lassen Sie mich ein Beispiel geben. Wir sehen ein Mädchen, das in vorgeschriebener Weise Tee bereitet. Dies geschieht mit bestimmten zeremoniellen Gesten, die in sich vollendet sind. Zum zweiten zeigt der Schauspieler, wie dies Mädchen heftig oder duldsam oder verliebt ist. Dabei zeigt er zum dritten, wie ein Schauspieler Heftigkeit, Duldsamkeit oder Verliebtheit mit wiederkehrenden Gesten zum Ausdruck bringt.⁶⁹

Rejecting any link with mysticism and intoxication, Brecht argued that, in contrast to orthodox theatre which duped the audience into believing the illusion on stage, Chinese theatre offered:

eine nützliche Reinigung der Sinne. [...] Hier werden keine Anstrengungen unternommen, um die Illusion aufrechtzuerhalten, das Spiel sei eine wirkliche Begebenheit. Hier wird ungeniert die technische Seite des Theaters aufgezeigt [...].

⁶⁷ Lars Kleberg, ‘Die Zauberlehrlinge: Protokoll einer Diskussion vom 14. April 1935 in Moskau aus Anlaß des Gastspiels des chinesischen Schauspielers Mei Lan-fang in der Sowjetunion’, *Lettre Internationale*, no. 2, (1988) 75-80 (77).

⁶⁸ Lars Kleberg, ‘Die Zauberlehrlinge’, 80

⁶⁹ Lars Kleberg, ‘Die Zauberlehrlinge’, 79.

Die Kunst der Chinesen ist frei von jeder naturalistischen Illusion, von der das Publikum im Westen abhängig zu sein scheint wie von Opium.⁷⁰

In an ironic attempt to illustrate the “Primitivität der westlichen Schauspielkunst” and the extent to which audiences had become reliant on the actor’s ability to successfully deceive them, Brecht suggested that Mei-Lan-fang would be required to assure American audiences that, although he portrayed female roles on stage, he was “aber kein Transvestit”:

Man mußte besondere Pressenmitteilungen ausschicken, in denen betont wurde, daß Dr. Mei Lan-fang in jeder Hinsicht ein normaler Mann sei, ein guter Familienvater, ja sogar Bankier. Wir wissen, daß es in gewissen Gegenden immer noch notwendig ist, zur Vermeidung von Insultationen dem Publikum mitzuteilen, der Darsteller des Schurken sei selber kein Schurke.⁷¹

Above all, the encounter in Moscow illustrates the extent to which oriental theatre represented the battleground upon which the confrontation with orthodox, illusionistic theatre methods was being carried out at that time, simultaneously underlining the political implications of the conflict for Brecht:

Sowohl Sergej Tretjakow als auch Wsewolod Meyerhold griffen aus ähnlichen Motiven wie Brecht auf Traditionen des asiatischen Theaters zurück und waren damit Antipoden des zur Staatskunst kanonisierten Stanislawski-Theaters.⁷²

⁷⁰ Lars Kleberg, ‘Die Zauberlehrlinge’, 79. Brecht’s rejection of comparisons with mysticism is a direct reaction to Eisenstein’s following statement: “Das chinesische Theater führt uns zu Schichten unseres eigenen Denkens zurück, zu denen der schaffende Künstler niemals den Kontakt verlieren darf: zu den goldglänzenden Grotten des archaischen Bewußtseins, in denen wir uns dem Geheimnis der ursprünglichen Einheit nähern, der Einheit von Bild und Ausdruck, von Vernunft und Gefühl, der Prinzipien yin und yang, von männlich und weiblich,” ‘Die Zauberlehrlinge’, 78.

⁷¹ Lars Kleberg, ‘Die Zauberlehrlinge’, 79.

⁷² Sabine Kebir, *Abstieg in den Ruhm*, p. 142.

Indeed, Brecht was heavily criticised by Party functionary Platon Kerschentsev in his concluding address. Comparing Brecht to Tretiakov, who, on account of his aesthetic preferences would be liquidated the following year, Kerschentsev stated:

Seine Fetischisierung der künstlerischen Techniken auf Kosten der ideologischen und vor allem der die Wirklichkeit widerspiegelnden Aufgaben der Kunst ist für uns sowjetische Kulturschaffende so wohlbekannt wie unheilsschwanger. Es ist kein Zufall, daß Genosse Brecht so viele Gemeinsamkeiten mit Genossen Tretjakow gefunden hat, dessen faktenreicher Beitrag doch nicht sein Verhaftetsein mit den Ideologien des Futurismus und des Proletkults verbergen konnte.⁷³

Sabine Kebir concludes that the episode was a palpable indication of the fact that the Soviet Union “bereits 1935 für Brecht und Weigel als Exilland nicht mehr in Frage kam.”⁷⁴ Yet Brecht’s encounter with Stanislavski in Moscow, home of the Art Theatre, has much wider implications for the present study. That Brecht met Stanislavski in 1935, just three years before the Soviet director’s death and at a time when he had turned his attention to the role of physical action, begins to suggest a *selective* reception of the System on Brecht’s part – that he might have been more informed of the later modifications to the System than any of the notes of the 1930s would subsequently indicate. Coupled with the fact that Tretiakov was Brecht’s main Soviet point of contact, it is difficult to imagine that Brecht would not have been more up to date with the artistic situation in the USSR, where the ‘method of physical action’ had been singled out by cultural politicians as the culmination of the System. As 1935 was also the year that Brecht would rehearse with Stella Adler during his visit to New York, herself an advocate of Stanislavski’s later methods, it seems increasingly likely that Brecht was aware, to

⁷³ Lars Kleberg, ‘Die Zauberlehrlinge’, 80.

⁷⁴ Sabine Kebir, *Abstieg in den Ruhm*, p. 145.

a certain degree at least, of Stanislavski's theoretical developments – but that the overtly psychological incarnation of the System in America would represent a rival approach too valuable to lose. To acknowledge the differences would, arguably, have run counter to Brecht's artistic objectives and ultimately lessened the impact of Stanislavski's System as a viable aesthetic antithesis to his own theoretical reformulations of the late 1930s.

As with a great number of the major theoretical notes of this period (culminating in the 'Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt'), 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst' very much conveys the sense that Brecht was attempting to refine his own theoretical approach as a demystified alternative to what he perceived as an established system of introspective, psychological techniques in preparation for a potential exile in America. Thus, whilst the earlier version essentially represents Brecht's immediate reactions to the performance by Mei Lan-fang, virtually the last quarter of the revised essay in the English version are focused upon a discussion of his own innovations, indicating a studied attempt by Brecht to conceptualise his theoretical position. The later version also bears indications of Brecht's work in New York with the American Stanislavskians, as the 'conscious' performance techniques exemplified by the Chinese approach (and further explored in Brecht's theatre), are contrasted alongside Stanislavski's 'Einfühlungstechnik' and the 'subconscious' methods of actor/character identification. Antony Tatlow confirms this point, stating that the essay was obviously written by Brecht:

directly under the impact [...] of [...] the depressing performance of *Die Mutter* in New York, which brought home to him the reality of the problem, for which Chinese acting seemed to offer a solution.⁷⁵

The title of the English translation of the essay contains a reference to the theatrical convention of the fourth wall. André Antoine is credited with being the first to use the term at *Le Théâtre libre* to describe the notion of an invisible fourth wall separating the stage and audience, who are in turn able to observe the characters as if ‘eavesdropping’ on a real event. Stanislavski adopted the idea in his own quest to create the illusion that the audience was witnessing real and spontaneous events in the immediate present, through an imaginary fourth wall. As Boleslavsky explains in his book *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, in order to guarantee the totality of the spectator’s acquiescence, the actor should ensure that he does not let an awareness of the audience interrupt him in the moment of creation, thereby perpetuating the illusion of an invisible fourth wall:

They must feel [...] that you are more powerful than they, that, for the moment, you are the most important person in the world, and nobody dares disturb you [...] it is the actor’s own fault if he allows the public to interfere with his creation.⁷⁶

In contrast, as Brecht informs us in ‘Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst’, the Chinese performer “spielt vor allem nicht so, als existiere außer den drei Wänden, die ihn umgeben, auch noch eine vierte Wand” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 201). Rather, the actor makes it clear in his performance that he is aware of the audience’s presence and, by doing so, effectively dismantles the illusion of

⁷⁵ Antony Tatlow, *The Mask of Evil. Brecht’s Response to the Poetry, Theatre and Thought of China and Japan. A Comparative and Critical Evaluation* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1979), p. 317.

⁷⁶ Richard Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, p. 27.

a fourth wall and the whole elaborate technique:

vermittels derer es verborgen werden kann, daß die Szenen so angelegt sind, daß sie vom Publikum bequem eingesehen werden können. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 201)

The fourth wall discussion, part of the 'dritte Nacht' which make up the *Der Messingkauf* fragments written around 1945, expands upon the references to the convention in the essay 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst'. Responding to the Dramaturg's opening question, "Wie ist es mit der vierten Wand?" with a deliberate display of ignorance the Philosopher requests an explanation from the Dramaturg which will then be used to dismantle the convention:

DER PHILOSOPH: Was ist das?

DER DRAMATURG: Für gewöhnlich spielt man so, als ob die Bühne nicht nur drei Wände, sondern vier hätte; die vierte da, wo das Publikum sitzt. Es wird ja der Anschein geweckt und aufrechterhalten, daß was auf der Bühne passiert, ein echter Vorgang aus dem Leben ist, und dort ist natürlich kein Publikum. Mit der vierten Wand spielen heißt also so spielen, als ob kein Publikum da wäre. (*GBA* 22.2, p. 802)

The Actor's ensuing, typically enthusiastic, clarifications are likewise conveniently placed to enable the Philosopher's derision:

DER SCHAUSPIELER: Du verstehst, das Publikum sieht, selber ungesehen, ganz intime Vorgänge. Es ist genau, als ob einer durch ein Schlüsselloch eine Szene belauscht unter Leuten, die keine Ahnung haben, daß sie nicht unter sich sind. In Wirklichkeit arrangieren wir natürlich alles so, daß man alles gut sieht. Dieses Arrangement wird nur verborgen. (*GBA* 22.2, p. 802)

The Actor's words imply violation – encroaching upon a scene whose participants have "keine Ahnung" that they are not alone, the audience witnesses "ganz intime Vorgänge" in an act comparable to the furtive peering through a keyhole. In an exchange which demonstrates the difference between the Stanislavskian notion of

reality as surface verisimilitude and the portrayal of socially insightful truth – a distinction central to the essay on ‘Einfühlung’ from the First Night *Messingkauf* texts written during 1941-43 (*GBA* 22.2, pp. 784-86) – the Actor underlines the importance of the fourth-wall convention “für realistisches Spiel”. Yet, as the Philosopher is quick to respond, the attempt to create the semblance of authenticity on stage has in fact little in common with reality:

Aber daß man im Theater sitzt und nicht vor einem Schlüsselloch, ist doch auch eine Realität! Wie kann es da realistisch sein, das wegzuschminken? Nein, die vierte Wand wollen wir niederlegen. (*GBA* 22.2, p. 803)

Rejecting total transformation, ‘Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst’ describes how the Chinese performer is not required to enter a trance-like state of unconsciousness on stage and may thus be interrupted at any time – we do not witness the actor in the “mystische Augenblick der Gestaltung” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 206). With the minimum of illusion, the actor stands between the audience and the events merely ‘quoting’ the character and lending “eine großartige Distanz zu den Vorgängen” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 202). By observing himself on stage the Chinese artist allegedly brings about an act of ‘Selbstentfremdung’. He achieves this, Brecht states, “dadurch, daß er sich selbst und seine Darbietungen mit Fremdheit betrachtet” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 202), thereby thwarting the audience’s unreserved identification with the actor-as-character. Such an attitude precludes the automatic ‘Übertragung’ of sensations, preventing “emotionelle Ansteckung” and the theatrical forcing of empathy, regarded by Brecht as a fundamentally barbaric operation. Unlike Stanislavskian theatre in which actor and audience are emotionally overwhelmed by the character, in a Chinese

production “niemand wird von dem Individuum vergewaltigt, das er darstellt: es ist nicht der Zuschauer selber, es ist sein Nachbar” (GBA 22.1, p. 203). Yet empathy *per se* is not entirely rejected within Chinese theatre – the spectator identifies with the actor as a bystander and accordingly cultivates the attitude of an observer. Alluding to the deceptive artifice of the orthodox style of acting, Brecht queried the willingness of an actor of the old school to risk demonstrating the elements of his art without the special lighting and refinements of the theatre. The outcome, he claimed, would be the elimination of any mystery from the stage – like a conjuror at a fair who, having revealed the pretence behind his art, can provoke no further interest in his audience:

Er würde lediglich zeigen, wie man sich verstellt. Die Hypnose fiel weg, und es blieben ein paar Pfund schlecht verrührte Mimik übrig, eine schnell zusammengemischte Ware für den Verkauf im Dunkeln, an eilige Käufer [...]. Wo bliebe die Heiligkeit der Kunst? Die Mystik der Verwandlung? (GBA 22.1, p. 204)

Brecht’s aim throughout the text is to suggest a technique capable of supplanting what he perceived to be an anachronistic, representational approach to acting, the essence of which had become the standard in America:

Stanislawski gibt eine Reihe von Kunstmitteln, ein ganzes System, an, vermittle derer das, was er creative mood, Schaffenslaune nannte, immer von neuem, bei jeder Vorstellung herbeigezwungen werden kann. Dem Schauspieler gelingt es nämlich für gewöhnlich nicht lange, sich wirklich als der andere zu fühlen [...]. Dies kommt zweifellos daher, daß die Kreierung des andern ein »intuitiver«, also dunkler Akt war, der im Unterbewußtsein vor sich ging. (GBA, 22.1 pp. 203-04)⁷⁷

⁷⁷ As John J. White points out, Brecht’s deliberate attempt at terminological hybridity by leaving the term ‘creative mood’ in its original language amongst the German text “is deprived of much of its impact when merely appearing in quotation marks as English among English” in Eric Walter White’s translation of the essay. *Bertolt Brecht’s Dramatic Theory*, pp. 92-3.

The revised version strongly indicates that Brecht had begun to familiarise himself with Stanislavski's book *My Life in Art* following his request in February for Steffin to translate sections of it for him. 'Creative mood' is an expression referred to by Stanislavski on more than one occasion in the book to describe that special condition:

for the appearance of inspiration by means of the will, that condition in the presence of which inspiration was most likely to descend into the actor's soul [...] creative mood is the spiritual and physical mood during which it is easiest for inspiration to be born.⁷⁸

Elsewhere Stanislavski refers to the creative mood as a divine gift:

Before creating it is necessary to know how to enter the temple of that spiritual atmosphere in which alone it is possible to create [...] creativeness on the stage demands first of all a special condition, which [...] I will call the creative mood. [...] All men of the stage [...] are able to receive the creative mood, but it is not given them to control it with their own will. They receive it together with inspiration in the form of a heavenly gift.⁷⁹

Given the experiential emphasis lent to the interpretation of the System as a result of Lee Strasberg's work with 'affective memory' at the Group Theatre and its influence on acting approaches in America, it is entirely conceivable that 'creative mood' was a term with which Brecht had come into contact during his trip to New York. Indeed, in his book *The Fervent Years*, Harold Clurman uses analogous terminology to describe the use of 'affective memory' at the Group Theatre during the early 1930s:

In this "exercise" the actor was asked to recall the details of an event from his own past. The recollection of these details would stir the actors with some of the feeling involved in the original experience, thus producing "mood". These exercises were used to set the mechanism of the actor's emotion rolling [...] When the actor was in

⁷⁸ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 426.

⁷⁹ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, pp. 425-26.

the grip of this mood [...] the actor was better prepared to do the scene calling for the particular mood that the exercise had evoked.⁸⁰

For Brecht the Chinese art of acting represented an alternative to the representational verisimilitude and total transformation encouraged in Stanislavskian theatre. Yet, as he points out in the final part of the essay, it will only be 'transportabel' and effective as a weapon in the struggle against illusion if politicised and combined with 'Historisierung' – a dimension that is missing from both Stanislavskian *and* Chinese theatre. Brecht discusses Piscator's stage adaptation of Theodore Dreiser's novel *An American Tragedy* (it is no coincidence that Brecht uses American examples in a text which is seemingly preparing the ground for an American exile) in order to compare how the bourgeois, illusionistic theatre and the historicized theatre would each handle a scene in which a young girl is shown leaving home to take a job in a large town:

Für das bürgerliche Theater ist dies eine Angelegenheit von geringer Tragweite, sichtlich der Beginn einer Geschichte, das, was man erfahren muß, um das Nachfolgende zu verstehen, oder um auf das Nachfolgende gespannt zu sein. Die Phantasie der Schauspieler wird kaum sehr dadurch in Gang gesetzt werden. In gewisser Hinsicht ist der Vorgang allgemein: junge Mädchen nehmen Stellen an (im vorliegenden Fall kann man gespannt sein, was ihr nun besonderes passieren wird). Er ist nur insofern besonders: dieses Mädchen geht weg (wäre sie dageblieben, hätte das Folgende sich nicht ereignet). Daß die Familie sie gehen läßt, ist nicht Gegenstand der Untersuchung, es ist glaubhaft (die Motive sind glaubhaft). (GBA 22.1, pp. 208-09)

The emphasis here is on the inevitable, natural and "das Ewig-Menschliche" – it is, Brecht states, "eine geschichtslose Auffassung":

Durch die Anordnung der Fabel werden solche »allgemeine« Situationen geschaffen, daß der Mensch schlechthin, der Mensch aller Zeiten und jeder Hautfarbe, sich

⁸⁰ Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years*, p. 44.

nunmehr ausdrücken kann. Alle Vorgänge sind nur das große Stichwort, und auf dieses Stichwort erfolgt die »ewige« Antwort. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 208)

However, in the historicizing theatre in which man as is presented as a variable entity capable of mastering his environment, the scene would have been handled differently in order to highlight the out-of-the-ordinary events – “es wirft sich ganz und gar auf das Eigentümliche, Besondere, der Untersuchung Bedürftige des so alltäglichen Vorgangs”(GBA 22.1, p. 209). The technique of historicisation facilitates the examination of one social system from the historical perspective of another and urges both actor and audience to bring contemporary insights to bear upon another period. Thus, if he is to be effectively able to play the scene as a unique historical occurrence, presenting the spectator with a “historischen Bericht” of social changes (*GBA* 22.1, p. 210), the actor must answer the following questions:

Wie, die Familie entläßt aus ihrer Hut ein Mitglied, damit es sich nunmehr selbstständig, ohne Hilfe den Lebensunterhalt verdient? Ist es dazu imstande? Was es hier, als Familienmitglied, gelernt hat, wird ihm das helfen, den Unterhalt zu verdienen? Können Familien ihre Kinder nicht mehr behalten? Sind sie eine Last geworden oder geblieben? Ist das so bei allen Familien? War das immer so? Ist das der Lauf der Welt, der nicht zu beeinflussende? Wenn die Frucht reif ist, fällt sie vom Baum. Gilt hier dieser Satz? Machen sich die Kinder immer einmal selbstständig? Taten sie es zu allen Zeiten? Wenn ja, wenn es etwas Biologisches ist, geschieht es immer in der gleichen Weise, aus demselben Grunde, mit den gleichen Folgen? (*GBA* 22.1, p. 209)

Using the ‘V-Effekt’, the actor presents events with the same detachment as the historian in order that their socio-historical aspect may emerge – “alle Vorgänge unter Menschen werden geprüft, *alles* muß vom gesellschaftlichen Standpunkt aus gesehen werden” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 210). Thus, unlike the Stanislavskian performer, whose indiscriminate use of emotional identificatory techniques results in a

psychologized performance, the actor in the historicizing theatre must ensure that he does not make the character his own, instead submitting it to the audience's criticism:

Die Schauspielerin darf den Satz nicht zu ihrer eigenen Sache machen, sie muß ihn der Kritik überantworten, sie muß das Verständnis seiner Motive ermöglichen und den Protest. Der Effekt ist nur nach langem Studium hervorzubringen. (GBA 22.1, pp. 209-10)

If the actor portrays the character as being moved by *social* forces which differ according to the historical period, as opposed to exclusively *emotional* impulses, the spectator will be less disposed to forming an empathic bond with the figures on stage – “die Jetztzeit wird zur Historie” (GBA 22.2, p. 736). Aware that what they are watching is not a series of unrehearsed and spontaneous events, the spectators are thus discouraged from regarding them as absolute or beyond alteration, or the conduct of those involved as predetermined and universally human – a factor further explained in *Kleines Organon für das Theater*:

Bewegen wir unsere Figuren auf der Bühne durch gesellschaftliche Triebkräfte und durch verschiedene je nach Epoche, dann erschweren wir unserm Zuschauer, sich da einzuleben. Er kann nicht schlechthin fühlen: so würde ich auch handeln, sondern kann höchstens sagen: wenn ich unter solchen Umständen gelebt hätte; und wenn wir Stücke aus unserer eigenen Zeit als historische Stücke spielen, mögen ihm die Umstände, unter denen er handelt, ebenfalls besonders vorkommen, und dies ist der Beginn der Kritik (GBA 23, p. 79).

In what was clearly a reply to both the restrictions of Socialist Realism and the pervasive influence of Stanislavski's methods upon contemporary theatre practice, at the beginning of 1937 Brecht turned his attention to the organization of a “*produzierenden kleinen Gesellschaft*” (GBA 29, pp. 22-23). Although they ultimately remained unrealised, Brecht's plans for the ‘Diderot-Gesellschaft’ – an

international theatre society “which would approach the problems of theatre in a scientific spirit”⁸¹ – are indicative of a desire strengthen his own conceptual system with a view to securing a wider audience for the Epic Theatre. With his failure to effectively introduce his dramatic reforms to the American stage still fresh, Brecht perceived the Society as the potential platform from which to communicate his theoretical innovations with other practitioners. Indeed, as one interpreter has pointed out, “In der ‘Diderot-Gesellschaft’ sieht Brecht u.a. die Möglichkeit, sich mit dem System Stanislawskis auseinanderzusetzen”.⁸² Based upon contemporary artistic developments and potentially comprising such artists as Hanns Eisler, Erwin Piscator, Max Gorelik, Jean Renoir, Sergei Tretiakov, Nikolai Ochlopkov and Sergei Eisenstein – prominent “stage people [...] of a pioneer turn of mind”⁸³ – the society would promote the exchange of theoretical viewpoints and the publication of reports detailing technical problems and experimental advances within the fields of film and theatre. Brecht’s strategy for the proposed organisation emphasised the development and regulation of a realistic, “d.h. die Realität meisternde[n] [...] Darstellung des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens der Menschen” as an alternative to orthodox methods of hypnotic enchantment:

Die Erfahrungen anderer Leute sind für den Visionär entbehrlich. Das Experiment gehört nicht zu den Gepflogenheiten des Sehers. Andererseits muß der Künstler, dem neuen Auftrag folgend, bei der Übermittlung seiner Abbildungen verzichten auf die Mittel der Hypnose, unter Umständen sogar der gewöhnlichen Einfühlung, die dem

⁸¹ Mordecai Gorelik, ‘Bertolt Brecht’s “Prospectus of the Diderot Society,”’ *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 48, no. 2 (April 1961), 113-17 (113).

⁸² Werner Hecht, *Brecht Chronik 1898-1956* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), p. 505.

⁸³ Mordecai Gorelik, ‘Bertolt Brecht’s “Prospectus of the Diderot Society,”’ 113.

Künstler früherer Epochen zur Verfügung standen. (GBA 22.1, p. 276)

According to the objectives of the proposed association, the society would aim at furthering artistic experimentation, encouraging “Vorschläge für termini technici” from its members with a view to establishing a standard of artistic presentation:

Solange das Theater als eine Stätte aufgefaßt wurde, wo sich nur künstlerische Persönlichkeiten ausdrückten, war es kaum möglich, von einem technischen Standard der Theaterkunst anders als in bezug auf einige mechanische Neuerungen, wie Beleuchtungstechnik und Verwandlungstechnik, zu sprechen. (GBA 22.1, p. 275)

In what is perhaps an indication of the radical nature of the proposed agenda of the collective, Brecht wrote to Piscator in March 1937 urging him to keep their correspondence on the subject private (GBA 29, p. 23).

As Willett points out, together Brecht and Piscator “tentatively planned some joint theoretical statements to set against the spread of the Stanislavsky method”.⁸⁴ Yet, despite positive reactions from both Piscator and Gorelik, there seems to have been little further interest in the ‘Diderot-Gesellschaft’, and Brecht’s plans for the theatre society remained unrealised. Nonetheless, one very obvious outcome of Brecht’s proposals for the ‘Diderot-Gesellschaft’ and the formation of a technical terminology was the ‘Kurze Beschreibung’ with its emphasis on a theorised acting approach.

Following the failure of the Theatre Union’s production of *Die Mutter*, it is clear that Brecht’s experience with the American purveyors of Stanislavski’s

⁸⁴ John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator: Half a Century of Politics in the Theatre* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), p. 186.

approach provided the impetus behind much of the Stanislavski criticism he composed during the latter half of the 1930s and his subsequent desire to establish a society dedicated to evolving a demystified technical vocabulary. Keen to learn more about a mode of practice that was exerting such a persuasive hold upon left-wing American theatre, in February 1937 Brecht received the first two issues of a newly established theatre journal entitled *Theatre Workshop*, courtesy of his friend Mordecai Gorelik. Gorelik was one of the contributing editors to the new journal, alongside John Howard Lawson, Barrett H. Clark and, most notably, Lee Strasberg. In terms which echoed those expressed in his letter to Piscator some eight months earlier (*GBA* 28, pp. 557-58), Brecht replied to Gorelik in early March 1937 referring to his plans for the 'Diderot-Gesellschaft' and reiterating the need to develop a technical methodology for the discussion and dissemination of a new theatrical approach:

Gerade in der Pionierzeit, in der wir uns befinden, am allerersten Anfang, brauchen wir die kleinen, unbelasteten, freimütigen Berichte über einige Versuche, einige aufgetauchte Probleme, Teilversuche, Teilprobleme, einen kurzen Vorschlag für einen neuen terminus technicus [...]. Das würde unsere Arbeit lebendig machen und spezifizieren. (*GBA* 29, p. 18)

Responding to the articles in *Theatre Workshop*, Brecht claimed that Stanislavski's methodology was progressive in so far as it represented "so etwas wie ein System" and offered "ein bißchen Technik" – somewhat concessionary assertions which are however relativised by Brecht's use of the formulations "so etwas wie" and "ein bißchen" (*GBA* 29, p. 17). Brecht reiterated the point in a note written around the same time entitled 'Fortschrittlichkeit des Stanislawski-Systems' – "Das System Stanislawskis ist ein Fortschritt schon deswegen, weil es

ein System ist" (*GBA* 22.1, p. 284). Brecht's comment here may be understood in the light of both his recent failure to introduce his theatrical reforms to America, and his quixotic efforts to pool artistic innovations with the aim of establishing a specialised technical vocabulary. Indeed, the key theoretical texts of the late 1930s repeatedly illustrate Brecht's preoccupation with the refinement of his own technical methodology. As James K. Lyon points out, the journal indicated to Brecht "how strongly American theatre was becoming committed to "method acting", with its basis in the concepts and models of Stanislavsky".⁸⁵ Among the articles published in the first two issues of *Theatre Workshop*, Brecht discovered further evidence of what he considered the "trübe Welle" of Russian bourgeois art which had enveloped American theatre (*GBA* 29, p.17). The articles are significant in that they provide the basis of Brecht's understanding of the System at that time, preparing the way for the polemic that was to characterise a series of unpublished notes composed during March 1937, questioning the premises of Stanislavski's stage practice.

Of the articles printed in the first two issues of *Theatre Workshop*, 'The Work of the Actor' by Josef M. Rapoport and 'The Actor's Creative Work' by Ilya Sudakov would appear to have made the most impression on Brecht. The latter is further significant in that, translated especially for the Group Theatre and emphasising the role of 'emotion memory', it quite possibly played an important part in further influencing the American interpretation of the System, which under the influence of Strasberg was being explored by such theatrical collectives as the

⁸⁵ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, p. 12.

Theatre Union.⁸⁶ Critics have hitherto paid little attention to these articles and Brecht's knowledge of them has been uniformly disregarded by commentators, such as Hecht, Morely and Eddershaw – each of whom have examined, to some extent, the Brecht/Stanslavski complex. Distinguished by the fact that they convey a clear bias towards the early articulation of the System, the articles reinforce the fact that the sources of information available to Brecht at that time were both limited and highly selective. Indeed, it is also significant that as none of the articles on Stanslavski's methodology printed in the first two issues of the journal were by the Soviet practitioner himself, the information they impart once again represents a *mediated* account of the System.

Appearing in October 1936 with the sub-heading 'The Art of Acting', the first issue contained Josef M. Rapoport's essay 'The Work of the Actor'. In it Rapoport (a pupil and co-worker at the Moscow Art Theatre) outlines exercises in attention, justification, the development of the creative fantasy, public solitude and stage attitude – all of which are ultimately aimed at investing the characterisation and scenic atmosphere with the illusion of reality. Again, it is significant that the emphasis in Rapoport's article is on the actor's emotional preparation for a role and, as such, the paper is consistent with early Stanslavskian approaches. Embodying the part as though he were speaking his own words and not the memorised lines of the character, the actor is urged to experience "all the feelings

⁸⁶ Christine Edwards, *The Stanslavsky Heritage*, p. 258.

and emotions which the character in the play [...] undergoes”.⁸⁷ A serious attitude towards the surrounding stage-fiction is presented as being essential, if the actor is to induce the audience to believe in the scenic life of his creation. In what subsequently became a passage disparagingly referred to by Brecht on more than one occasion, Rapoport expounds the following exercise in stage attitude:

On the stage the actor is surrounded entirely by fictions [...]. The actor must be able to regard all this as though it were true, as though he were convinced that all that surrounds him on the stage is a living reality and, along with himself, he must convince the audience as well. This is the central feature of our method of work on the part [...]. Take any object, a cap for example, lay it on the table or on the floor and try to regard it as though it were a rat; make believe that it is a rat, and not a cap; try to justify this attitude with your creative fantasy: picture what sort of rat it is, what size, colour? [...]. We thus compel ourselves to believe quite naively that the object before us is something other than it is and at the same time learn to compel the audience to believe it.⁸⁸

The limitations of this type of exercise are further highlighted if one compares it to an episode described by Brecht in a journal entry dated 9 July 1943, written during exile in America. Here Brecht refers to his meeting with the Chinese author and actor H. T. Tsiang. Brecht describes his acting as an attempt to combine Asiatic forms of expression “mit den unsrigen, mit einigem Stanislawski drinnen”. The journal entry recounts Tsiang’s demonstration of how the Chinese actor, using a stick as a gun,

einfach den Stock als Symbol für das Gewehr nehmen; er (be)handelt den Stock als Gewehr, unterstreicht sein Gewicht, die Rundung des Kolbens usw. Soweit Illusionstechnik à la Stanislawski. (*GBA* 27, p. 156)

⁸⁷ Josef M. Rapoport, ‘The Work of the Actor’, *Theatre Workshop*. Issue 1 (Oct-Dec 1936), 5-40 (8).

⁸⁸ Josef M. Rapoport, ‘The Work of the Actor’, 16-17. See also *GBA* 22.2, pp. 649-50 and p. 776.

However, real art begins, Brecht states, when the gun “selber behandelt wird wie ein Stock, der als Gewehr behandelt wird, dh. wo das Gewehr selber verfremdet wird”. Through a process of circuitous paradox, associations have been raised and the item has become something unusual – an object of inquiry. In contrast, Rapoport suggests a number of exercises to aid the actor in developing a realistic response to imaginary stimuli in the absence of a literal object, all with the aim of creating illusion:

take a stool and establish an attitude to it, 1) as though it were a beehive, 2) a dog-kennel where there is a fierce dog in front of which you have to pass [...]. Next, suppose that you are alone in a forest. Your attitude to the objects around you must change, and be appropriately justified [...]. You will walk round the chair and look for mushrooms, you will see a nail and be surprised at finding it in the middle of a forest [...] you will believe that you are in a forest [...] and you will also compel the audience to regard the stage as though it were a forest.⁸⁹

Following the preparatory techniques described by Rapoport, the actor is able to justify a ‘realistic’ attitude towards unreality, in turn compelling the audience to believe in the authenticity of the stage fiction:

By means of stage-belief, as serious an attitude towards the fictitious as towards the real, the actor can carry the audience with him, and by living and feeling his part he can compel the spectators to be moved by these emotions along with himself.⁹⁰

The actor-as-character must justify his behaviour to such an extent that the spectator is convinced by every action. In order that his words and actions are credible, the actor pursues the same objectives as the character to the point whereby he *lives* the role:

Behave as though [...] you were a watch-maker and someone tried to induce you to repair a second time a watch you had just repaired. You must justify your behaviour

⁸⁹ Josef M. Rapoport, ‘The Work of the Actor’, 18-19.

⁹⁰ Josef M. Rapoport, ‘The Work of the Actor’, 18.

to such an extent that the spectator will believe you are a watch-maker. You must handle the watch [...] so deftly that no one doubts you are a genuine watch-maker [...]. In order that the spectator shall be convinced by the acting, the actor must himself be absorbed by the role [...]. By sympathising with the part and living the part he will experience its emotions and thereby carry the audience along with him.⁹¹

In contrast to the Stanislavskian actor who, following Rapoport's example, is encouraged to handle the timepiece with such expertise and familiarity that the audience does not doubt for one second that he is a watch-maker, in the 'Anhang' to 'Kurze Beschreibung' Brecht cites the watch as an example of an everyday object which we need to approach afresh, as if looking at it for the first time:

Ein einfacher V-Effekt wird angewendet, wenn man jemandem sagt: Hast du dir schon einmal deine Uhr genau angesehen? Der mich das fragt, weiß, daß ich sie schon oft angesehen habe, nun, mit seiner Frage, entzieht er mir den gewohnten, daher mir nichts mehr sagenden Anblick. Ich sah sie an, um die Zeit festzustellen, nun stelle ich, auf eindringliche Art befragt, fest, daß ich die Uhr selber nicht mehr eines staunenden Blickes gewürdigt habe, sie ist nach vielen Richtungen hin ein erstaunlicher Mechanismus. (GBA 22.2, p. 656)

According to Rapoport, the actor's strength of will lay at the root of his ability to successfully merge with the character: "We said that the actor must make himself share the objectives of the character he is playing. He must fulfil the task by using his will-power".⁹² Yet for Brecht, the Stanislavskian actor's total transformation into the role marked the dissolution of any social perspective. Indeed, encouraged to "master the character's words and actions [...] thoughts and feelings"⁹³ whilst at the same time merging with his creation, the actor's so-called dominance over the character's inner life conversely manifests itself in the subordination of his

⁹¹ Josef M. Rapoport, 'The Work of the Actor', 32-33.

⁹² Josef M. Rapoport, 'The Work of the Actor', 22-23.

⁹³ Josef M. Rapoport, 'The Work of the Actor', 37.

own perspective to that of the role.

With his own short note entitled ‘Zu Rapoport »The Work of the Actor«, Brecht formulated a derisive response to Rapoport’s article. Protesting that the audience would hardly be able to master its own situation, “wenn alles geschieht, sie selber zu meistern”, Brecht drew a comparison between the spectator’s ‘geschmackliche Befriedigung’, which he regarded as the main aim of such an approach, and his own notion of ‘kulinarisches Theater’ – which he now used with direct reference to Stanislavski:

Der in Trance Versetzte mag glauben, daß sein Wille gesteigert sei; sein Impuls, den Apfel zu essen, der ihm vorgesetzt wird (und der ein Papierballen ist), ist sehr mächtig, vielleicht ist es auch seine geschmackliche Befriedigung; aber er ist natürlich nicht gesättigt, es ist ihm nicht gelungen, seinen Magen zu bedienen, seine Kritik war ausgeschaltet, er konnte sein Interesse nicht erkennen. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 282)

Fully immersed in the character “in den er sich »along with the actor« verwandelt hat”, the person in the audience is coerced into a vicarious experience – a communion in which they are ultimately deceived into accepting the artifice of the stage fiction:

der Zuschauer [...] erlebte so, zwangsläufig, ganz bestimmte »events«, geht durch ganz festgelegte Stimmungen und Impulse, sieht alles von unten aus, nicht mit seinen Augen, sondern mit denen des Charakters, der er ist, so wie die Mütze die Ratte ist. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 282)

Indeed, Brecht’s criticism of Stanislavski’s techniques duly reflects what he perceived as an intrinsic emphasis on force, and the notion of an imposed will is now much more polemically focused than the hypnosis model outlined in the ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper »Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny«’ (*GBA* 24, p. 79). The Stanislavskian actor, he asserts, is a servant of art and the spectator – the

“victim [...] of a hypnotic experience in the theatre”, obliged to assume “a subjective attitude of becoming completely »entangled« in what is going on”.⁹⁴ In what Brecht had come to regard as a means of rendering the faithful passive, the audience, in thrall to the illusions of reality being presented on stage, is lured into a state of unproductive inertia. The spectator’s ‘total abandonment’ thus becomes an involuntary act induced by the pervasion of illusion. In naturalising the stage surroundings and making the events seem real, Stanislavski compelled the audience’s acceptance of both the authenticity and subsequent irrevocability of that ‘reality’. Whilst the ‘through-line of action’ afforded the performance a causal certainty, the ‘given circumstances’ imposed a predetermined set of actions and responses upon both actor and audience. In contrast, Brecht’s ‘Nicht-Sondern Modell’, formulated in the ‘Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die ein Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt’, represents a ‘Kontrafaktur’ to the essentialist notion of a ‘fixed’ performance. In contrast to the Stanislavskian actor who, obliged to abide by the ‘given circumstances’ of the character’s behaviour outlined in the text, conveys a ‘natural’ and fixed reality to the audience, the Brechtian actor’s presentation of the role is dialectical and undertaken in order to suggest alternatives. The ‘Nicht-Sondern Modell’ and Brecht’s further use of ‘Kontrafakturen’ as a legitimate means of reception will be examined later on in this chapter.

⁹⁴ *The New York Times*, 24 November 1935, Section 9, 1. Also *GBA* 22.1, pp. 164-68/*GBA* 22.2, pp. 939-44. The article was originally composed by Brecht in German and was later translated into English for publication in the *New York Times*, presumably with the help of Eva Goldbeck.

Rejecting this type of reality as surface verisimilitude, Brecht argued that, with their essentialist emphasis on the causal sequence of inevitability, Stanislavski's productions defied the inconsistency of a social reality fixed in the process of perpetual change. On the contrary, Brecht sought to show not:

das »ewig Menschliche« [...], nicht was angeblich alle Menschen zu aller Zeit tun, sondern das, was in unserer Zeit zum Unterschied zu andern Zeiten, Menschen bestimmter gesellschaftlicher Schichten zum Unterschied zu andern Schichten tun.
(GBA 24, p. 208)

Implying that they represented more a set of *rules* than a guiding system, in 'Stanislavski [1]', Brecht suggested that Stanislavski's exercises were synonymous with a *forcing* of empathy: "die Kunst wurde ganz deutlich immer mehr zur Kunst, die Einfühlung herbeizuzwingen" (GBA 22.1, p. 280). Such sentiments would later culminate in 'Gespräch über die Nötigung zur Einfühlung' written in 1953, and Brecht's rejection of the theatrical forcing of empathy as a fundamentally 'barbaric' operation.

The notion of empathy as a politically suspect process is present throughout Brecht's criticism of the Stanislavskian 'Einfühlungstechnik', and indeed its role as an instrument of oppression is central to 'Über die Theatralik des Faschismus'. Here, in what is a far more *political* critique of 'Einfühlung' than 'Die Straßenszene', Brecht examines the Fascists' "besonderen Sinn" for the theatre, and the "ganzen Haufen von Effekten" which they have borrowed from it (GBA 22.1, p. 563). One such element, he states, is empathy. With its potent appeal to the emotions, Fascism applies 'Einfühlung' on a grand scale as a mechanism of

control aimed at denying reasoned criticism and suppressing the individual's point of view. As Knopf points out:

Die endgültige Bestätigung seiner Kritik an der Einfühlung lieferte ihm der Faschismus, der durch einen hoch technisierten Einsatz eben dieser Kunstmittel der Einfühlung auf politischer Ebene Massenrausch und Massenwahn zu erzeugen vermochte.⁹⁵

What is at issue here is the non-aesthetic use of theatre theory, applied in order “to reveal the source of a ruthless demagogue's rhetorical appeal and undermine it [...] it is artistic knowledge serving non-aesthetic purposes”.⁹⁶ Like an actor in the Aristotelian tradition, Hitler enlists the technique of theatrical identification, appealing directly the emotions of his public:

Es entsteht da die *Einfühlung* des Publikums in den Agierenden, die man für gewöhnlich als das wesentlichste Produkt der Kunst ansieht. Da ist dieses Mitreißen, dieses alle Zuschauer in eine einheitliche Masse Verwandeln, das man von der Kunst fordert [...]. Er [Hitler] [...] versucht, das Volk, besser gesagt das Publikum [...], fühlen zu lassen, was er fühlt [...]. Er vertieft seine Zuschauer in sich, verwickelt sie in seine Bewegungen, läßt sie »teilnehmen« an seinen Sorgen und Triumphen und verleidet ihnen jede Kritik, ja jeden Blick auf die Umwelt von ihrem eigenen Standpunkt aus. (GBA 22.1, pp. 565-67)

Thus, as Brecht maintains, his conduct appears fixed and unalterable:

Damit erreicht er, daß sein Verhalten als ein sozusagen naturgesetzliches Verhalten erscheint. Er ist so, wie er ist – und alle (sich in ihn einfühlend) sind so wie er. Er kann nicht anders, als er muß – und alle können nicht anders und müssen so. (GBA 22.1, p. 567)

Fascism represents for Brecht a political paradigm for identificatory theatre and an illustration of the dangers of a theatre based on total empathy:

Wer sich in einen Menschen einfühlt, und zwar restlos, der gibt ihm gegenüber die Kritik auf und auch sich gegenüber. Anstatt zu wachen, schlafwandelt er. Anstatt etwas zu tun, läßt er etwas mit sich tun [...]. Darum ist die theatralische Darbietung,

⁹⁵ Jan Knopf, *Bertolt Brecht*, p. 84.

⁹⁶ John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, p. 290.

wie sie durch den Faschismus gegeben wird, kein gutes Beispiel eines Theaters, wenn man von ihm Darstellungen haben will, die den Zuschauern den Schlüssel für die Bewältigung der Probleme des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens aushändigen. (GBA 22.2, p. 569)

The note is a salutary, if extreme, illustration of the dangers of an empathic response. Accentuating the parallels between the politically dubious process of empathy and the similarly autocratic aim of identificatory theatre, 'Über die Theatralik des Faschismus' has wider implications for Brecht's critique of Stanislavskian methodology and provided him with a further, major means of assault against the System. According to Brecht, Stanislavski had formulated a performance approach that granted total assimilation between actor and character – a methodology, which, ensuring that the actor "nicht aus der Rolle fiel", guaranteed emotional immersion and identification (GBA 22.1, p. 280). The System, he claimed, consisted:

ziemlich ausschließlich aus Vorschlägen, wie die Einfühlung des Zuschauers, seine Identifikation mit Figuren des Stückes, erzwungen werden kann [...]. Die von ihm vorgeschlagene Spielweise erzwingt die Einfühlung des Zuschauers systematisch, d.h. sie bleibt nicht ein Ergebnis des Zufalles, der Laune oder der Ingeniums. (GBA 22.1, pp. 284-85)

Emotionally overwhelmed by the characters they are portraying, actors in the Stanislavskian tradition are encouraged to "feel, speak, and infect the spectator with the manner in which they live their roles"⁹⁷, thereby provoking, as Brecht had formerly claimed in the essay 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst', an act of emotional *contagion* ('emotionelle Ansteckung') upon the audience. Thus, a successful Stanislavskian performance is one in which the actor *dictates* the feelings of his audience, ensuring that their "sorrow as acted in

⁹⁷ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 500.

the given role has brought tears of sympathy to the eyes of the spectators or that [their] happiness makes them happy”.⁹⁸ Brecht would return to the notion of the actor-as-dictator a couple of years later in *Der Messingkauf*:

DER PHILOSOPH: Es ist wahr, du bist ein ziemlich tyrannischer Mensch. Auch von der Bühne herab fühle ich mich ständig tyrannisiert. Ich soll immer, wie du willst. Ohne daß ich Zeit habe, mir zu überlegen, ob ich will, wie du willst.

DER DRAMATURG: Siehst du, jetzt fühlt er sich auch von der Bühne herab auf die Knie geklopft! Was sagte ich?

DER PHILOSOPH: Ist nicht auch wirklich etwas daran? Denkt nach! Ein Zuschauer sagt euch, er fühlt sich auf das Knie geklopft, durchschaut, verstanden, besser als er sich versteht, auf geheimen Lüsten ertappt, darin befriedigt! Liegt darin nicht etwas Abscheuliches? (GBA 22.2, p. 783)⁹⁹

In ‘The Actor’s Creative Work’, printed in the second issue of *Theatre Workshop*, Sudakov refers to the *laws* governing the actor’s creative work and of training “one’s artistic nature in subjection to them”.¹⁰⁰ Truth, or the justification behind the actor’s movements, is defined as an “instrument of control”¹⁰¹ which, censoring the execution of each action, effectively guarantees the audience’s ultimate capitulation to the stage fiction. In turn, the perpetuation of stage illusion

⁹⁸ Josef M. Rapoport, ‘The Work of the Actor’, 37.

⁹⁹ Reflecting his observations of American theatre, in *Kleines Organon für das Theater*, Brecht further describes the *tyrannical* hold the ‘star’ performer has over his fellow actors – “Hier ist einiges aus der Unsitte unserer Theater zu lernen, daß der herrschende Schauspieler, der Star, sich auch durch »hervortut«, daß er sich von allen andern Schauspielern bedienen läßt: er macht seine Figur fürchterlich oder weise, indem er die Partner zwingt, die ihren furchtsam oder aufmerksam zu machen usw.” (GBA 23, p. 88)

¹⁰⁰ Ilya Sudakov, ‘The Actor’s Creative Work’, *Theatre Workshop*. Issue 2, (Jan-March 1937), 7-42 (8).

¹⁰¹ Ilya Sudakov, ‘The Actor’s Creative Work’, 18.

is of paramount importance if complete control over the audience is to be maintained:

It is to be noted that the presence and the hypertrophied awareness of the audience beget certain [...] shortcomings in the nature of the communion [...] for after all, the audience must be held firmly in hand.¹⁰²

Far from arousing the critical faculties of the audience, Brecht argued, the spectator's curiosity was effectively compromised by a seductive stage artifice which presented the stage action as real and therefore inevitable. The sharp, inquisitive eye of the audience frightens him, Brecht wrote of the Soviet practitioner in 'Stanislawski [2]', once again alluding to the element of force inherent in the System – "er schließt es" (*GBA* 22.1, p. 283).¹⁰³ In contrast to the "eingeschüchterte, gläubige, »gebannte« Menge" which make up the audience in Stanislavskian theatre, in the *Kleines Organon für das Theater* Brecht states that "die fertiggestellten Abbildungen in völliger Wachheit abgeliefert werden [müssen], damit sie in Wachheit empfangen werden können" (*GBA* 23, p. 97). In a further illustration of how much sharper Brecht's theory had become in the light of his experiences with the American Stanislavskians, Brecht drew another parallel between what he termed Stanislavski's 'suggestive Technik' – the means of propagating falsehood in the theatre – and 'kulinarisches Theater':

Natürlich kann man einen Mann in der Hypnose auch dazu bringen, einen *Apfel* als Apfel zu essen, aber sollte man dies nicht ohne Hypnose erreichen können? (*GBA* 22.1, p. 283)

¹⁰² Ilya Sudakov, 'The Actor's Creative Work', 21.

¹⁰³ This imagery reappears in 'Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus [1]', written a year later in the midst of the *Expressionismusdebatte*: "Das scharfe Auge der Arbeiter durchdrang die Oberfläche der naturalistischen Wirklichkeitsabbildungen" (*GBA* 22.1, p. 412).

The contact between actor and audience had to be realised in a manner other than the suggestive. In formulating a systematic approach to acting aimed at truth, Stanislavski had, Brecht asserted in 'Stanislawski [2]', merely succeeded in creating "einen wahren Leitfaden für das (natürliche) Lügen" (GBA 22.1, 283). Having requested that Steffin translate some of *My Life in Art* Brecht was by now familiar with Stanislavski's book, and his accusations seem to be a response to the Soviet director's recurrent assertions that the actor must make even the most blatant falsehoods on stage appear real:

The actor says to himself: 'All these properties, make-up, costumes, the scenery, the publicness of the performance, are lies. I know they are lies [...]. But *if* they were true, then I would do this and this, and I would behave in this manner and this way towards this and this event' [...]. From the moment of the appearance of *if* the actor passes from the plane of actual reality into the plane of another life [...]. The lie must become or seem to be the truth on the stage in order to be convincing. The truth on the stage is something in which the actor, the artist, and the spectator believe sincerely and implicitly.¹⁰⁴

His was a technique of 'natural' representation, which, Brecht claimed, attempted to pass off the fiction on stage as reality:

Wurde es so fraglich, ob Stanislawskis System eine Technik enthielt, mit der man die Wahrheit sagen konnte, so wurde es immer deutlicher, daß eine solche suggestive Technik jedenfalls ausgezeichnet ist, die Unwahrheit zu sagen. Wir wissen von jenen Schulen für Verkäufer, wo die Angestellten lernen, suggestiv zu verkaufen. Alle diese Haltungen sind oft beobachtbar bei Täuschungsabsichten (»versetzen Sie sich in meine Lage«; »auch Sie hätten nicht anders gehandelt«, »wenn ich Sie ware, würde ich...«, »ich würde es nicht sagen, wenn ich es nicht glaubte«). (GBA 22.1, p. 283)

Thanking Max Gorelik for the journals in a letter from the beginning of

¹⁰⁴ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life In Art*, p. 430 and p. 449.

March 1937, Brecht unleashed a vicious attack upon a System which he perceived as apolitical and wholly inconsistent with truly Marxist theatre. The methods proposed by Stanislavski were, Brecht declared in his letter to Gorelik, entirely antithetical to the depiction of socio-historical conditions on the stage:

von Klassen nichts, von Gesellschaft nichts, von Ökonomie nichts und die Revolution hat überhaupt nicht stattgefunden. Diese ganze Technik war schon vorher da, in den Tagen des Väterchen Zar. (GBA 29, p. 17)

The underlying implication is that the regime's endorsement of an artist whose work overlooks the Revolution is essentially misplaced. Whilst his remarks remained in the relatively safe context of an unpublished, private letter, they nonetheless represent an explicit political attack on Stanislavski and the closest Brecht comes to condemning more than just his methodology.

In 'Realistische Abbildungen des menschlichen Verhaltens' – a note originally intended for publication in *Theatre Workshop* but never actually sent to the editors – Brecht discussed previous, so-called realistic, artistic attempts at portraying man's social existence. Citing the efforts of Stanislavski, Brecht contended that such an aesthetic could only succeed in developing the portrayal of man's social existence in as much as both society and man's attitude to social reality had changed. No longer the victim of an absolute and irreconcilable fate, man was beginning to regard himself as the master of his own destiny. It had thus proven necessary to alter the purpose or motivation behind the portrayal, stripping it of any spiritual impetus rooted in traditional variants on Aristotelian catharsis, to incorporate a social dimension: "Die Darstellung des menschlichen Zusammenlebens hatte nunmehr zugleich eine Darstellung jenes Prozesses zu

sein, in dem die Menschen das gesellschaftlich Notwendige produzierten.” To realise such a process a new approach to the representation of reality was required – one that encompassed a social attitude: “eine ganz bestimmte Technik, die sich unter den Mitteln der alten Ästhetik nicht vorfand” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 278). In the theoretical notes of the late 1930s, Brecht would increasingly occupy himself with the systematic development of such a performance technique.

Brecht’s notes indicate that he had difficulty detecting *any* social motivation behind the various characterisation exercises outlined in the articles by Rapoport and Sudakov. In ‘The Actor’s Creative Work’, Sudakov relates an incident from a rehearsal of a scene from *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which Mitya (played by L.M. Leonidov), overcome by jealousy, breaks into Grushenka’s apartment in search of her:

L.M. Leonidov frantically broke into the apartment and rushed along the room from one end to the other, but neither he nor the director [...] had that feeling of satisfaction which comes when actual truth is achieved. Wanting to find the cause, Nemirovich-Dantchenko [*sic*] went up on the stage and began to experiment with himself in the role of Mitya. All of a sudden everyone felt – there it was – the real truth. What had happened? “I just began”, Nemirovich-Dantchenko told us, “to look for a comb which I felt I had lost in that room.”¹⁰⁵

Brecht responded to the anecdote with a short note ‘[Sudakow]’ in which he contested that the underlying social significance of Nemirovich-Danchenko’s demonstration had not been adequately explored. An elementary act such as searching for a misplaced personal possession, undertaken primarily in order to

¹⁰⁵ Ilya Sudakov, *The Actor’s Creative Work*, 10.

convey the frenzy of a lover's jealousy, could, he contested, have been developed into a 'Verfremdungseffekt' to illustrate the social significance of the scene:

daß in dieser Gesellschaft das Fehlen einer Frau dasselbe bedeutet, wie das eines Kammes oder einer Zahnbürste, eines Gegenstandes persönlichen Besitzes, eines nicht an andere ausleihbaren Gegenstands des täglichen Gebrauchs. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 284)

In a further chapter entitled 'The Feeling of Truth', Sudakov discusses the actor's use of 'shadowing' whilst on stage – a self-censoring measure which, applied by the actor to gauge the 'correctness' of his characterisation according to his natural sensibilities, raises the "alarm whenever a catastrophe impends":

Whenever I do something on stage, I inevitably take cognisance of a sixth-sense – I have to see to it that I perform my task correctly. I cannot rid myself of that feeling of shadowing myself [...]. When one dissembles in life, he keeps an eye upon himself to see whether or not his dissembling is good enough, since any failure in this respect may lead to undesired results [...]. Upon the stage [this feeling] must always be present.¹⁰⁶

Whilst the Stanislavskian technique of self-observation may evoke Brecht's notion of the 'Sich-selber-Zusehen des Artisten' – an act of 'Selbstentfremdung', by which the actor, observes "sich selbst und seine Darbietungen mit Fremdheit" (*GBA* 22.1, p. 202), thereby incorporating a critical attitude into his performance – here the technique is applied without any such cognitive detachment or social motivation. In his essay 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst', Brecht compared his own use of self-observation to that proposed by Stanislavski:

Nur ist der Schauspieler bei dem Nachprüfen der *Wahrheit* seines Vortrags (einer notwendigen Operation, die Stanislavski in seinem System viel Mühe macht) nicht

¹⁰⁶ Ilya Sudakov, 'The Actor's Creative Work', 17.

nur auf sein »natürliches Empfinden« angewiesen: er kann jederzeit durch einen Vergleich mit der Wirklichkeit [...] korrigiert werden, also von außen, durch andere Personen. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 205)

The actor's style of playing in a Brechtian production is such that he is not only conscious of his own analysis of the role, but also of the criticism exercised by the audience, who are likewise invited to pass judgement on the character. Indeed, practically every gesture is submitted to the spectator for critical evaluation. Yet whilst the actor's 'Vergleich mit der Wirklichkeit' has no such politically-motivated equivalent in Stanislavskian performance technique, it does begin to touch on the notion of 'perspectivized' acting in Stanislavski's later methodology which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Brecht was similarly critical of the lack of social motivation behind the exercises outlined by Rapoport in 'The Work of the Actor'. Describing an exercise in which the actor, having struck a random pose, is then required to find a suitable, 'real-life' justification for the pose, Rapoport continues:

let us assume that you raised both hands above your head [...]. Now try to imagine under what circumstances you might make such a movement in real life. Say you raised your hands to reach washing hanging on the line, or that you wanted to keep a basket from falling off a shelf [...]. Having found the justification you yourself will feel the difference between the pose that has a reason behind it and one without a reason.¹⁰⁷

According to Stanislavski, the justification of a part consists in putting life into all of the:

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¹⁰⁷ Josef M. Rapoport, 'The Work of the Actor', 14.

imagined circumstances and actions until you have completely satisfied your *sense of truth*, and until you have awakened a *sense of faith* in the reality of your sensations. This process is what we call *justification* of a part.¹⁰⁸

Brecht was highly suspicious of the use of justification in Stanislavskian theory, regarding it as the socially deficient, disingenuous procedure by which the actor learns to ‘authenticate’ his characterisation, making fiction appear real: “Da gab es »impulsive« Gesten, die einer »Rechtfertigung« bedurften” (GBA 22.1, p. 281). For Brecht, justification suggested validation and the spectator’s acquiescence with the ‘given circumstances’. In a process almost the complete opposite to that which Brecht would later describe in an unassigned *Messingkauf* fragment [B 161] (GBA 22.2, pp. 822-24), finally outlining it in more detail some 16 years later in ‘Stanislawski-Studien [3]’ (GBA 23, pp. 227-28), social motivation is presented by Rapoport as the *first* stage of characterisation. Before immersing himself in the role, the actor is required to make a ‘social evaluation’ of the character:

We must [...] understand the relation of the given character to the surrounding reality [...] and thereby determine what causes determine his behaviour and what ends he pursues. In this way we make a social analysis of the play and of the role. [...]. The determination of the prevailing action and simultaneously the social evaluation of the character are the foundation upon which we build the given character. After this [...] we must live with him, mentally, through his entire life, so that the action reproduced in the play will be for us the portrayal of a life almost as familiar as our own.¹⁰⁹

But since the actor is effectively required to sink his personality into that of the role, social insight is forsworn by a performance in which he is ultimately rendered indistinguishable from the character. In response to this, Brecht suggested that a critical distance had to be built into the manner of acting. Thus,

¹⁰⁸ Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁹ Josef M. Rapoport, ‘The Work of the Actor’, 38-39.

the Stanislavskian actor's use of the 'magic *If*' as a lever into the life of the part is effectively superseded by a Brechtian performance, in which the actor demonstrates an alternative action – the essence of the 'Nicht-Sondern Modell':

Er mußte Kritik üben können. Neben dem Handeln seiner Figur mußte sichtbar gemacht werden können ein anderes Handeln, so daß Auswahl und eben Kritik möglich war. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 280)¹¹⁰

In Brecht's schema, social evaluation would become the final stage in the characterisation process, as outlined in 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]'. The intended outcome would be a dialectical performance in which the actor incorporates a social perspective into his performance, communicating political insights through his use of action on stage.

In terms that confirm his familiarity with both *My Life in Art* and Sudakov's article, and which reiterate those used in 'Das verräterische Vokabular' (written during March 1937), Brecht's reply to Gorelik criticised the mystical, quasi-religious nature of the System. Again, the actor's complete transformation into the character is described in terms of transubstantiation, implying an irrational and cultic process of initiation:

Die Kunst ist immer noch, oder wieder (?), »heilig«. Der Schauspieler soll »dienen«.
Wem? Der Kunst. Die Gestaltung soll »schöpferisch« sein. »Der Schöpfer«, das war

¹¹⁰ John J. White addresses Brecht's use of both singular and plural alternatives to the character's actions thus: "What explains this discrepancy between a simple one-to-one antithesis and a contrast between a single given and a variety of conceivable alternatives is Brecht's assumption that actors need to engage critically with the stage material in order to "fix in their minds" which alternative the performance should communicate. [...] Whereas the dialectical negation of what is shown is a relatively simple operation, the prior selection of the (politically) logical alternative involves a choice". *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, pp. 110-11.

immer Gott. Der Schauspieler verwandelt sich, wie in der Missa das Brot sich in Jesu Leib verwandelt. Was auf der Bühne geschieht, muß »rechtfertigt« (justifiziert) werden, wie beim Jüngsten Gericht alles, was auf Erden geschah. Die »Konzentration«, das ist die »Selbstversenkung« des Mystikers. Der Schauspieler soll spielen, als gäbe es, wo der Zuschauer sitzt, eine 4. Wand, er ist »allein«, mit seinem Gott, der Kunst. (GBA 29, p. 17)

It is likely that the reference to the fourth-wall convention in the last part of the quoted extract is a response to Sudakov's claim that the actor's "hypertrophied awareness of the audience"¹¹¹ is detrimental to his work on stage. Instead Sudakov cites the actor's 'concentration of attention' as a necessary condition:

for release from the spell of the auditorium, for achieving the state wherein the actor may go on doing his work in public without being at all self-conscious [...]. Such a state is the creative 'I am'.¹¹²

Stanislavski recommends that the actor cultivate a 'circle of attention' on stage to help them forget the presence of the audience – his term for what the actor experiences whilst within this 'circle' is 'public solitude'. Whilst Brecht encouraged the actor's awareness of, and direct appeal to, the audience (indeed this had constituted one of the main areas of contention between him and the Theatre Union practitioners), the Stanislavskian actor confines his attention to a limited circle, thereby achieving the sensation of being entirely alone on stage: "During a performance, before an audience of thousands, you can always enclose yourself in this circle like a snail in a shell."¹¹³ By eradicating all signs of artificiality, Stanislavski's 'circle of attention' increases the effect of a fourth wall,

¹¹¹ Ilya Sudakov, 'The Actor's Creative Work', 21.

¹¹² Ilya Sudakov, 'The Actor's Creative Work', 19.

¹¹³ Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 82.

thereby rendering the spectators the “accidental witnesses of a strange life,”¹¹⁴ and encouraging their belief in the events on stage. As Counsell explains, weaving “all of the production’s elements into a single whole” the actor creates:

a symbolic space separate from that of the audience [...] the System banishes signs of artifice by eradicating stage fright and by having the actor acknowledge *only* those things that fall within the symbolic space.¹¹⁵

Strasberg himself used a similar exercise in his classes at the Group Theatre called the ‘private moment’. The aim, as with Stanislavski’s ‘public solitude’, was to aid actors in behaving naturally in front of an audience and to combat their awareness of being observed. Yet, like the other techniques adapted from Stanislavskian methodology for use in the Method, Strasberg’s ‘private moment’ has powerfully personal overtones, encouraging the actor to perform “in front of others an action from personal life so private that he or she would never want to be seen doing it”.¹¹⁶ It is likely that this was a technique with which Brecht came into contact during the production of *Mother* at the Theatre Union.

By exaggerating features of the approach and relating them to the cultic and the religious, Brecht parodied the Stanislavskian style of acting. The terms cited in Brecht’s letter to Gorelik are intended as satirical points of reference to aspects of Stanislavski’s stagecraft and their inclusion here is part of a larger, conscious attempt to undermine the aura surrounding the Soviet theoretician’s practice. In singling out the quasi-religious character of the System, Brecht was

¹¹⁴ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, p. 492.

¹¹⁵ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance*, p. 44.

¹¹⁶ Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 178.

effectively questioning the validity of those stage forms that had come to be considered customary. The use of quotation-marks to highlight certain concepts peculiar to Stanislavski's practice is a satirical, defamiliarisation device which, intended to convey Brecht's opposition to those concepts, also invites us to reconsider established modes of orthodox theatrical technique. These are not indigenous Stanislavskian terms but Brecht's own ironic 'take' on the System – yet the satirical 'attribution' of these terms to Stanislavski through Brecht's use of quotation-marks has the effect of making the case against him appear all the more damning. Whilst Stanislavski's System had become the vehicle of Soviet Socialist Realism, assuming an iconic status that had begun to exert a significant influence on Western acting methods, Brecht questioned the incongruity of the approach, arguing that the System preached the merits of a series of *contrived* spiritual exercises, "wie bei den Jesuiten", to assist the actor in *manufacturing* "richtiges Fühlen" (GBA 29, p. 17). Transformed into the role, the actor-as-character presents artificial surrogates for reality – a quasi-hypnotic 'Theatererlebnis', for which the credulous spectators, bound to the characters by a "mysterious invisible bond",¹¹⁷ are rendered incapable of finding any alternative: "Das Publikum muß hypnotisiert werden, »wie gebannt« auf die Bühne starren" (GBA 29, p. 17). This act of "miraculous metamorphosis"¹¹⁸ on behalf of the performer is defined by Stanislavski in *My Life in Art* as the incarnation of the actor in the role:

All actors without exception must receive creative food according to the laws of nature, must treasure what they receive in their intellectual and emotional memory,

¹¹⁷ Richard Boleslavsky, *The Creative Theatre* (transcribed and edited by Michael Barroy, 1923), quoted in J. W. Roberts, *Richard Boleslavsky. His Life and Work in the Theatre*, pp. 138-39.

¹¹⁸ Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 285.

[...] must give birth to the image and the life of the human spirit, and having lived them over, incarnify them.¹¹⁹

Similarly, in *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski defines the actor's transformation into the character as "a natural act similar to the birth of a human being".¹²⁰

Indeed, as Sudakov explains in 'The Actor's Creative Work', in any performance based on Stanislavski's teachings the actor's transformation into the character is total – he is effectively *reborn* into that person:

The process of reincarnation begins with the choice of the very first action [...]. The actor [...] should project himself into the execution of simple actions laid down by the analysis of the role. The very variety of their combination [...] gives as a result a specific character differing from the manner of thinking and acting of the actor himself - that is, we have before us another person, a character.¹²¹

Formulated on the basis of both his experiences of the American interpretation of Stanislavski's System and the articles in *Theatre Workshop*, the polemical notes of March 1937 reinforce Brecht's criticism of the System's "mystischen, kultischen Charakter". As Michael Morley points out, Brecht's critique of Stanislavski was largely derived from what was becoming codified in the United States as an almost fanatical insistence on the psychological, on:

the cult of Stanislavski and what [...] his followers were seen to be promoting in his name [...]. He would not have been alone at that time [...] in equating the Stanislavskian approach with an over-emphasis on feeling, and with a fondness for a language with quasi-religious and cultist overtones.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Constantin Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, pp. 520-21.

¹²⁰ Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 312.

¹²¹ Ilya Sudakov, 'The Actor's Creative Work', 23 and 25.

¹²² Michael Morley, 'Brecht and Stanislavski: Polarities or Proximities?', in Maarten van Dijk and others, (eds), *I'm still here/Ich bin noch da, The Brecht Yearbook 22* (Waterloo, CA: The International Brecht Society, 1997), pp.195-203 (p. 196).

Basing his criticism on largely intermediary sources, Brecht accused Stanislavski of concocting an elaborate cult responsible for hypnosis within the theatre. The audience, he claimed, had been transformed into a captive congregation and the actor into “ein Diener der Kunst”. Brecht accused Stanislavski of turning art into priesthood, truth into a fetish and of infusing the stage with an aura of religious sanctity:

Die menschliche Seele kam hier nicht viel anders als in jedem beliebigen religiösen System vor, da gab es »Priestertum« der Kunst. Da gab es eine »Gemeinde«. Da wurden die Zuschauer »in Bann gezogen«. »Das Wort« hatte etwas mystisch Absolutes an sich [...]. Die Fehler, die gemacht wurden, waren eigentlich Sünden, und die Zuschauer hatten ein »Erlebnis« wie die Jünger Jesu an Pfingsten. (‘Stanislavski [1]’, *GBA* 22.1, p. 281)

The audience’s slavish acceptance of stage illusion was, Brecht argued in ‘Das verräterische Vokabular’, synonymous with both an avowal of bourgeois capitalism and its inevitability. On the contrary, Brecht stated:

Der arbeitende Mensch ist schöpferisch, keiner sonst, und er soll sich nicht im Geist, sondern in Wirklichkeit in einen Herrn seiner selbst verwandeln, indem er die Herrn niederschlägt. Er soll auch nicht allein bleiben mit seinem Gott, sondern sich vereinigen mit seinen Leidensgenossen, und er soll jeden Bann brechen, den man über ihn verhängen will [...]. Seine Seele braucht er nicht zu retten, wenn er nur sich rettet. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 279)

Whilst an obvious reference to what he perceived as the intrinsically fanatical character of the System, Brecht’s rejection of the almost religious status of Stanislavski’s theatrical approach is contemporaneous with Socialist Realist reforms in Soviet culture. Thus his criticism of the System as an “Art Kanonisation von Schauspielkunst”¹²³ may be read as a wider allusion to the

¹²³ Werner Hecht, ‘Grund der Empörung über eine ‘ganz unerträgliche Behandlung’’, 77.

deification of art in the USSR, in particular theatre, under the elevated ideals of the new aesthetic:

In Soviet Russia the theatre took the place of the [...] half-strangled Church [...]. Directors and actors became as it were the priests of a theatrical religion. The audience expected a production-sermon that would change their lives. So the phenomenon of the Soviet super-theatre evolved.¹²⁴

In the notes that followed, Brecht would attempt to advance an alternative technical vocabulary to that of the experiential methods which comprised Stanislavski's systematic approach. The 'Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die ein Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt' with its emphasis on performance technique would form the core of Brecht's efforts to refine his own theoretical system in some large part in response to Stanislavskian acting methodology.

Towards a *politicised* acting technique

In terms which implied the Russian director's methods had been more than just tested and found wanting, in 'Stanislavski [1]' Brecht wrote of the overhaul of the 'Einführungstechnik' within the theatre as a battle already won:

Der Zuschauer mußte aus der Hypnose entlassen, der Schauspieler der Aufgabe entbürdet werden, sich total in die darzustellende Figur zu verwandeln. In seine Spielweise mußte [...] eine gewisse Distanz zu der darzustellenden Figur eingebaut werden [...]. Der Prozeß mußte schmerzhaft sein. Ein riesiger Aufbau von Vorstellungen und Vorurteilen brach zusammen und lag [...] im Weg. (GBA 22.1, p. 280)

¹²⁴ Anatoly Smeliansky, *The Russian Theatre after Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. xx.

Whilst the formulation suggests a *fait accompli*, having clearly overestimated the potential of his own theatrical innovations to dismantle the gigantic superstructure of orthodox theatrical conceptions and prejudices, Brecht was nonetheless aware that the process to which he referred lay very much in front of him. Although he regarded the Theatre Union's decision to produce a play like *Die Mutter* as a positive sign, indicating their interest "ein großes proletarisches Theater in Amerika aufzubauen", it was also clear that he would have to refine his theoretical ideas for the theatre if the practical realisation of this new type of approach was to be effectively accomplished on the stage. His experiences in New York with the Theatre Union and Strasberg's company had indicated to Brecht the extent to which Stanislavskian techniques had begun to dominate American stage theatre practice. Yet he was nonetheless aware that the approach not only offered a structured performance methodology, but also presented left-wing theatre with a political justification for the use of emotional identification in the theatre:

Es ist kein Zufall, daß z. B. in Amerika gerade die linken Theater sich mit dem System Stanislawskis auseinanderzusetzen beginnen. Diese Spielweise scheint ihnen eine bisher unerreichbare Einfühlung in den proletarischen Menschen zu gewährleisten. Bei dieser Lage der Dinge ist es einigermaßen schwierig, mit der Mitteilung hervortreten, daß die neuere Dramatik sich nach einer Reihe von Erörterungen und Experimenten mehr und mehr gezwungen sieht, auf die Herstellung der Einfühlung mehr oder weniger radikal zu verzichten. (GBA 22.1, p. 285)

It is clear that both Brecht's objections to the Theatre Union's production of *Die Mutter* and his subsequent 'Auseinandersetzung' with the premises of Stanislavskian theatre conveyed an inherent opposition to the postulates of Socialist Realism. Indeed, in view of the sensitive artistic climate in which Brecht

was proposing a 'neue Dramatik' (just three years after Zhdanov's decree of Socialist Realism in the arts and the canonisation of Stanislavski in the USSR) it comes as no surprise that he confined much of his contentious criticism of Stanislavski to his unpublished notes, private letters and journal entries. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a statement less aesthetically prudent at that time than Brecht's suggestion in 'Verhinderung der Einfühlung' that the Epic Theatre could learn from an analysis of unsuccessful attempts at identification and the arousal of audience empathy. The implication is that such 'distractions' may be exploited for practical use in Epic Theatre:

Um uns einige Ratschläge zu holen, wie wir, wenn wir wollen, die Einfühlung des Zuschauers verhindern können, wollen wir die Beschreibung »schlechten« Spiels studieren, die ein Verfechter der Stanislawski-Methode gibt, die eine Einfühlung des Zuschauers anstrebt. Schlecht (poor) ist bei ihm alles, was die Einfühlung stört, also mag für uns gut sein. (GBA 22.1, p. 282)

Interestingly, Brecht's use of the portmanteau phrase 'Stanislawski-Methode' makes no distinction between Stanislavski's 'System' and the American 'Method' as a derivative *interpretation* of the former, for to acknowledge the difference would surely have interfered with Brecht's intentions. Brecht's censure of the American Stanislavskians also represents a less politically perilous rejection of Stanislavski's methods. Indeed, rather than having to admit to Stanislavski's centrality to Soviet cultural aesthetics, Brecht recognised the advantage in being able to criticise the preoccupation with the System in America, and accordingly directed his disapproval towards acting instruction in the USA. It was, after all, altogether more sensible for Brecht to pass judgement on American theatrical trends than openly reject the official vehicle of Soviet Socialist Realist theatre. As Bruce Cook points out, to a certain extent the Theatre Union:

with its preference for Stanislavski and their strict socialist realist orientation [gave] Brecht the Moscow production he had never had. If he [had had] problems with them, he would have had double the trouble in Russia.¹²⁵

Referring primarily to the growing prevalence of Stanislavski's techniques on the American stage, the 'Lage der Dinge', to which Brecht alludes above, also represents a cloaked allusion to the awkward cultural climate in which he was endeavouring to implement his theatrical reforms. The situation would culminate in the realism debate and the formal criticisms levelled against him by Georg Lukács during 1937 and 1938.

Since July 1936, Brecht had been working alongside Willi Bredel and Lion Feuchtwanger as co-editor of the Moscow-based, anti-fascist review *Das Wort*. By 1937, Fritz Erpenbeck and Alfred Kurella – both staunch supporters of the Hungarian theoretician Georg Lukács – had replaced Willi Bredel (who had gone to fight in Spain) as Moscow editors of the journal. Indeed, despite Lukács' reputation as the internal opponent within the Soviet camp, in the mid to late 1930s his theories were in favour with the cultural authorities. As David Pike points out:

Like ideology and political theory, Soviet literature had descended to the level of an adjunct to Stalin's exercise of political power, and Lukács helped to supply the theoretical rationale for this political degradation of art.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Bruce Cook, *Brecht in Exile* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982), p. 24.

¹²⁶ David Pike, *Lukács and Brecht* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 155.

With the launch of the ‘Expressionismusdebatte’ in *Das Wort*, by 1937 the ‘Lage der Dinge’ had begun to worsen significantly for Brecht. Encouraged by the inauguration of Socialist Realism at the All-Union Congress of Writers in 1934, the polemic was hostile to modernism and took as its aim the eradication of formalism in the arts.¹²⁷ Citing traditional, nineteenth-century forms of realism – most prominently the novels of Tolstoy and Balzac – as his ‘Musterbeispiele’ Lukács’s theoretical position echoed the call for writers to “find their way to the treasury of past literature [...] from [whom] they can learn”.¹²⁸ Brecht’s use of montage and interior monologue in *Der Dreigroschenroman* were dismissed by Lukács as both abstract aberrations and anti-realistic examples of literary decadence.¹²⁹ In March 1938, however *Das Wort* published ‘Der Spitzel’, one of the scenes from Brecht’s *Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches*. In his now famous essay, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, Lukács greeted ‘Der Spitzel’ as evidence of Brecht’s return to the fold of realistic dramatic convention:

Brecht hat in der dritten Nummer des *Wort* einen kleinen Einakter [...] veröffentlicht, in welchem er den Kampf gegen die Unmenschlichkeit des Faschismus bereits in einer bei ihm neuen, vieltönigen und abgestuften realistischen Weise führt.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ In fact the term ‘Debatte’ is misleading as, in reality, the dispute consisted very much of a one-way attack directed at Brecht. It had been called the ‘Expressionismusdebatte’ on account of its origins as a critique of the alleged ideological implications of expressionism and its so-called association with irrationalism and Fascism.

¹²⁸ Karl Radek, ‘Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art’, in *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934*, p. 146.

¹²⁹ See Brecht’s journal entry dated February 1939: “die *Montage* etwa gilt als Kennzeichen der *décadence*. Weil durch sie die *Einheit* zerrissen wird, das *Organische* abstirbt!” (*GBA* 26, p. 328).

¹³⁰ Georg Lukács, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, *Das Wort*, Issue 6, (June 1938), 112-38 (138).

In the light of his recent experiences with American theatre, *Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches* may, as one critic has suggested, be regarded as a “more or less conscious withdrawal on Brecht’s part, undertaken in the hope of getting his plays performed”.¹³¹ Yet whilst Lukács certainly interpreted the relative conformity of the piece as a direct attempt by Brecht to structure his work along more orthodox lines, Brecht *privately* dismissed such suggestions, claiming, in a journal entry dated 15 August 1938, that Lukács had in fact overlooked the unconventional composition of the play:

Übersehen ist die Montage von 27 Szenen und daß es eigentlich nur eine Gestentafel ist, eben die Gesten des Verstummens, Sich-Umblickens, Erschreckens usw (GBA 26, p. 318).

Lukács, Brecht protested, was receiving him as one would a sinner returning to the “Schoß der Heilsarmee” (GBA 26, p. 319) – a further allusion to the extent to which Soviet cultural policy approached aesthetic matters with an almost religious fanaticism.¹³²

In an article published in *Internationale Literatur*, Lukács criticised what he called “ein schriftstellerisch abstrakt-revolutionärer Utilitarismus” in Brecht’s plays and indentified an irreconcilable discrepancy between his political theory

¹³¹ Klaus Völker, *Brecht: A Biography* (London: Boyars, 1979), p. 242. Similarly Willett has called some of the scenes a return “to certain principles of the naturalistic stage”. John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects*, p. 179.

¹³² For a detailed examination of the role of *Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches* in the Moscow debate see the forthcoming article: John J. White, ‘Brecht’s *Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches* and the Moscow ‘Realism’ Controversy’, *Modern Language Review*, 100 (2005) 157-179.

and practice.¹³³ In June 1938 Brecht formulated a response to Lukács with an essay entitled ‘Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus’. Intended for publication in *Das Wort*, but never printed in the journal, the essay compared Lukács’ narrow and prescriptive definition of realism to formalism of the purest kind:

Wir dürfen nicht bestimmten vorhandenen Werken den Realismus abziehen, sondern wir werden alle Mittel verwenden, alte und neue [...], um die Realität den Menschen meisterbar in die Hand zu geben. Wir werden uns hüten, etwa nur eine bestimmte, historische Romanform einer bestimmten Epoche als realistisch zu bezeichnen [...], so für den Realismus nur formale, nur literarische Kriterien aufstellend. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 408)

Literary forms of expression could not be adopted like “Fabrikationsrezepte”, deduced from a narrow selection of traditional realist exemplars. Like the reality they sought to convey, such forms were historically bound to particular periods in the past and could not connect to an audience in a society which had since evolved. Society was in a constant state of development and accordingly demanded new approaches to depicting an ever-changing social reality. There was no such thing as eternal human behaviour. An artist who emulated such anachronistic models within his own work would, Brecht contended, ultimately cease to be a realist:

Ob ein Werk realistisch ist oder nicht, das kann man nicht feststellen, indem man nur nachsieht, ob es bestehenden, realistisch genannten, für ihre Zeit realistisch zu nennenden Werken gleicht oder nicht. Man muß in jedem einzelnen Fall die Schilderung des Lebens (statt nur mit einer anderen Schilderung) mit dem geschilderten Leben selber vergleichen. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 413)

Too broad a concept to be pinned to a few privileged models from the last century, the dynamic and contradictory nature of reality must be reflected in the means of

¹³³ Georg Lukács, ‘Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls’, *Internationale Literatur*, Issue 7, (1938), 103-43 (133).

its representation. What was needed, Brecht argued, were progressive modes of expression with a differentiated appeal – a new way of addressing contemporary social problems and exposing the dissenting forces in operation at various strata of the social structure:

Realistisch heißt: den gesellschaftlichen Kausalkomplex aufdeckend / die herrschenden Gesichtspunkte als die Gesichtspunkte der Herrschenden entlarvend / vom Standpunkt der Klasse aus schreibend, welche für die dringendsten Schwierigkeiten, in denen die menschliche Gesellschaft steckt, die breitesten Lösungen bereit halt / das Moment der Entwicklung betonend / konkret und das Abstrahieren ermöglichend. (GBA 22.1, p. 409)

Central to the debate are Brecht's and Lukács's conflicting interpretations of realism. Indeed, it is impossible not to read into Brecht's denunciation of "»die« Methode" an oblique criticism of the prescribed aesthetic boundaries that were being imposed on artistic innovation under Socialist Realism that parallels his rejection of the attempted hegemony of Stanislavski's System. Whilst it is clear that such definable ambiguity necessarily had a functional role, in a journal entry dated February 1939 Brecht argued that formalism too had yet to be given a clear political meaning:

Den literarischen Formalismus haben wir auch nicht politisch bestimmt, also gar nicht bestimmt. Unsere *Lukács'* leiten ihn simpel von der *décadence* ab. Die literarischen Avantgardisten sind dekadente Bourgeois, fertig. Man muß also von ihnen absehen und bei den Klassikern lernen. (GBA 26, p. 328)

Brecht advocated a concept of realism both free from imposed aesthetic constraints and "souverän gegenüber den Konvention[en]", one calling for a broader, more complex "und eben realistischer" 'Realismusbegriff':

Ich kann im Grund nicht glauben, daß Lukács tatsächlich für realistische Schreibweise nur ein einziges Muster, das des bürgerlichen realistischen Romans des

vorigen Jahrhunderts, aufstellen will [...]. Die einzelnen Werke müssen danach beurteilt werden, wieweit sie die Wirklichkeit im konkreten Fall erfassen, nicht danach, wieweit sie einem vorgestellten Muster historischer Art formal entsprechen. (GBA 22.1, p. 434)

Literary forms, he repeated in the essay ‘Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise’, should be checked against reality rather than against aesthetics – “auch nicht die des Realismus”, a definition which once again contains an implied criticism of the bureaucratic insistence on Socialist Realism. Likewise intended for publication in *Das Wort*, ‘Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise’ did not appear until 1954, when, published in *Versuche 13*, it finally revealed the extent of Brecht’s opposition to the promulgation of prescribed models of realism.

Following on from the Stanislavski polemic of the previous year, the notes written by Brecht in the context of the ‘Expressionismusdebatte’ are comparable with those earlier texts, with Lukács’ endorsement for the nineteenth-century bourgeois realist novel “paralleling the official support of Stanislavski’s methods in the theatre”.¹³⁴ Just as Brecht’s criticism of Stanislavski’s System – the official model of dramatic production in the Soviet Union – had challenged prescribed modes of theatrical realism, Brecht questioned the evaluation of art according to both “»erprobte« Regeln” and “ewige ästhetische Gesetze” (GBA 22.1, p. 408). Reluctant to be drawn into a debate which he regarded as “höchst schädlich und verwirrend”¹³⁵, and yet angered at seeing his work formally assessed and cast into

¹³⁴ John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator*, p. 140.

¹³⁵ GBA 29, p. 107. Compare Brecht’s ‘Praktisches zur Expressionismusdebatte’: “Sehr rasch ist die Debatte über den Expressionismus [...] zu einer Schlacht mit den Losungen *Hie Expressionismus* und *Hie Rationalismus* geworden. Alte Wunden brechen auf, neue werden

“die Schublade der bourgeoisen Dekadenz” (*GBA* 29, p. 109), Brecht effectively called into question both the subjection of art to rigid formal regulations and the nature of those guidelines:

Die Fabel muß so und so gebaut sein, die Charakteristik der Personen muß auf die und die Weise erfolgen, an menschlichen Konflikten müssen soundso viele vorhanden sein usw. usw. So verfahrenende Kritiker lassen mich befürchten, daß sie gar nicht möglichst realistische Schilderungen, d.h. Schilderungen, die der Wirklichkeit gerecht werden, haben möchten, sondern daß sie im Kopf ganz bestimmte Erzählungs- und Beschreibungsformen haben, denen sie die Wirklichkeit unterworfen sehen wollen. Sie fragen sich nicht, ob sie in einer Beschreibung die Wirklichkeit wiederfinden, sondern eine bestimmte Beschreibungsart. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 449)

Not prepared to see a novel termed ‘realistic’ simply because it bore similarities to the work of Balzac or Tolstoy, Brecht was similarly ill-disposed to the deification of a theatrical production simply on account of the fact that “it apes Stanislavski’s productions of Chekhov”.¹³⁶ Indeed, Brecht’s criticism of Stanislavski’s own “»erprobte« Regeln” accordingly represents a rejection of the inviolability of Lukács’ brand of Socialist Realism.

Turning to drama and representational, illusionist theatre, Brecht highlighted the inappropriateness of such artificial, disingenuous and outdated stage forms:

Auf dem Theater kann die Wirklichkeit dargestellt werden in sachlicher und in phantastischer Form. Die Schauspieler können sich nicht (oder kaum) schminken und sich »ganz natürlich« geben, und alles kann Schwindel sein, und sie können Masken grotesker Art tragen und die Wahrheit darstellen. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 410)

geschlagen, verjäherte Feind- und Freundseligkeiten werden ausgetragen, man schlägt sich und anderen in die Brust” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 419).

¹³⁶ Keith A. Dickson, *Towards Utopia: A Study of Brecht* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 226.

The presentation of reality as a historically fixed and unalterable entity did not measure up to Brecht's own progressive notion of realism as dynamic and ever-evolving. As one commentator has suggested, Epic Theatre was for Brecht measurably:

more realistic than even the most illusionistic products of Naturalism, and this includes the variant developed by Stanislavski into the authorised vehicle of Socialist Realism in Russia.¹³⁷

His reluctance to call a work *realistic* just because “man zum Beispiel »alles« riechen, schmecken, fühlen kann, wenn »Atmosphäre« da ist und wenn Fabeln so geführt sind, daß seelische Expositionen der Personen zustande kommen,” (*GBA* 22.1, pp. 408-9) echoed his earlier criticism of the Theatre Union's naturalistic, Stanislavski-inspired production of *Die Mutter*, indicating how much more focused his theory had become, in polemical terms, now that he had identified a specific antagonist:

Ich las Eure Bearbeitung. Hier fügt ihr ein »Guten Morgen« ein
Dort ein »Hallo, mein Junge«. Den großen Schauplatz
Füllt ihr mit Hausrat. Kohlgeruch
Kommt vom Herd. (*GBA* 24, p. 176)

Such methods of representation were, according to Brecht, anachronistic – “die Paprizierung” (and here he again alludes to the notion of culinary theatre) “des alten, in Verwesung übergegangenen Stücks Fleisch” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 411) which, insufficient even in serving the stomach, could do nothing to rouse the spectator's appetite for social change. In terms which again echoed those addressed to the members of the Theatre Union, Brecht continued:

Man braucht nie Angst zu haben, mit kühnen, ungewohnten Dingen vor das Proletariat zu treten, wenn sie nur mit seiner Wirklichkeit zu tun haben. Es wird

¹³⁷ Keith A. Dickson, *Towards Utopia*, p. 250.

immer Leute mit Bildung, Kunstkenner, geben, die sich dazwischendrängen mit einem »Das versteht das Volk nicht«. Aber das Volk schiebt ungeduldig diese Leute beiseite und verständigt sich direkt mit den Künstlern. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 411)

In a journal entry dated 12 September 1938 written in response to the death of Stanislavski less than a month earlier, Brecht composed a criticism of the Soviet theoretician's theatrical proposals which very much replicated the content of the texts produced during the previous year. Reiterating his disapproval of the System's cultic character, Brecht declared Stanislavski's approach "ein Sammelbecken für alles Pfäffische in der Theaterkunst" – a temple of art:

mit ihrem [...] Wortdienst, Dichterkult, ihrer Innerlichkeit, Reinheit, Exaltiertheit, ihrer Natürlichkeit, aus der man immer fürchtet und fürchten muß, "draus" zu kommen, entspricht ihrer geistigen Zurückgebliebenheit, ihrem Glauben an "den" Menschen, "die" Ideen usw. Das ist "echter" Naturalismus, die Natur ist der [*sic*] große Unbekannte, er wird imitiert, indem man seinen falschen Bart imitiert. (*GBA* 26, p. 325)

Applying Stanislavskian techniques, the actor is brought to a state where he is able to 'feel' by a series of spiritual ablutions. Art, he claimed, "wendet sich nun einmal an das Gefühl". In a journal entry written just under a month earlier, Brecht had, in like terms, expressed his disapproval concerning what he regarded as Maxim Vallentin's 'defection' to empathic methods of theatrical representation:

der einstige Leiter einer Berliner Agitproptruppe, Maxim Vallentin, ist in Moskau zum bürgerlichen Theater übergegangen und verkündet, man habe in der Kunst an das Gefühl zu appellieren, womit nur gemeint sein kann, den Verstand auszuschalten! (*GBA* 26, p. 319)

Brecht's concerns regarding the deification of art¹³⁸ were not merely confined to his criticism of Stanislavski's techniques, but rather reflected what was occurring to a far greater extent within the Soviet aesthetic climate under the elevated ideals of Socialist Realism. In a letter to Johannes R. Becher dated September 1938, Brecht expressed his concerns regarding the compatibility of his work with the official aesthetic:

Ich habe mit Befremden beobachtet, wie [...] de[r] Begriff des sozialistischen Realismus [...] außerordentlich eng und ganz und gar formal definiert, so eng und mit formalen Kriterien von solcher Art, daß ein großer Teil der zeitgenössischen revolutionären Literatur (darunter auch meine Arbeiten) nicht mehr als sozialistische, realistische Werke gelten können. (*GBA* 29, p. 109)¹³⁹

Literature and art "scheinen beschissen", he proclaimed in a journal entry dated January 1939 with reference to artistic 'developments' in the Soviet Union. Whilst Brecht implied in the same entry that his was 'positive criticism', his disillusionment with the Soviet aesthetic line was nonetheless obvious. Stanislavski's death had evidently done little to lessen the significance of the System as *the* model for Socialist Realist theatre and Brecht's major commentaries of this period accordingly reveal his own efforts to elaborate an alternative, politicised acting methodology. Indeed, in the wake of his proposals for a pioneering theatrical society committed to the development of a specialised technical terminology, the key theoretical texts of the late 1930s all indicate one

¹³⁸ This stance is partly derived from Walter Benjamin's "Entauratisierung" concept from *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* which maintains that, in the modern age of mechanical reproduction, the 'aura' of a work of art 'withers' once it has been mass reproduced.

¹³⁹ A claim which Brecht pursues in the essay 'Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise', *GBA* 22.1, pp. 424-33.

common tendency: a comprehensive attempt by Brecht to refine his own approach with an emphasis on the actor's performance technique.

Focusing upon the *practical* aspect of Epic Theatre, 'Die Straßenszene' is a case in point. Written in 1938, the text marks the start of this period of rigorous theoretical productivity, representing both a reaction to Brecht's experiences with the exponents of Stanislavski's theories in America and a response to detractors such as Lukács. The text also illustrates a somewhat new concern for Brecht – that of the theorised dimension of acting which would culminate in the practical performance proposals set out in the 'Kurze Beschreibung' two years later. This concerted focus on performance *technique* (which includes both rehearsal and preparation methods) is a vital aspect of Brecht's reception of Stanislavski. Consistent with the Stanislavski commentaries of the previous year, Brecht rejects the perceived cultic character of the System. In contrast, 'Die Straßenszene' proposes a "Grundform großen Theaters [...] eines wissenschaftlichen Zeitalters" (GBA 22.1, p. 371) which, aimed at establishing a demystified performance approach, functions without recourse to:

solche Erklärungen des Theaterspielens [...] wie »Trieb, sich auszudrücken«, »Aneignung fremder Schicksale«, »seelisches Erlebnis«, »Spieltrieb«, »Lust am Fabulieren« usw. (GBA 22.1, p. 378)

In a short note written at around the same time as 'Die Straßenszene', Brecht suggested that the Epic Theatre introduces the spectator to "ein Grundmodell [...] das gestattet, das Phänomen Theater ohne kultisches Vokabular zu behandeln" (GBA 22.2, p. 1022). The street-scene model represented a return to the simplest example of theatre – "auf ein gesellschaftliches Unternehmen, dessen

Beweggründe, Mittel und Zwecke praktische, irdische sind” – which did not aspire to such heights of spiritual incarnation and emotional intensity as Brecht associated with Stanislavski’s System (*GBA* 22.1, p. 378). Indeed the simple and earthly location of Brecht’s street-scene could not be further removed from the “tempelhafte[s] Theater Stanislawskis” (*GBA* 22.1, p. 177). As Brecht explained in a journal entry of 6 December 1940, the street-scene model was intended as “einen großen Schritt entgegen der Profanisierung, Entkultisierung, Säkularisierung der Theaterkunst” (*GBA* 26, p. 443). Its aim, on the contrary, was to redefine the function of the theatre in terms of its *political* purpose:

Die Verfechter dieses epischen Theaters führten ins Feld, daß die neuen Stoffe, die sehr komplizierten Vorgänge der Klassenkämpfe im Augenblick ihrer entsetzlichsten Zuspitzung, auf solche Art leichter zu bewältigen seien, weil die gesellschaftlichen Prozesse in ihren kausalen Zusammenhängen damit dargestellt werden könnten. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 371)

Following on from his elucidation of the ‘V-Effekt’ in the essay ‘Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst’, ‘Die Straßenszene’ proposes a “verhältnismäßig neue Spielweise”, by means of which the actor, in contrast to Stanislavskian methodology, is able to maintain detachment during his performance:

Vermittels einer nicht ganz einfachen Technik distanzierte sich der Schauspieler von der Figur, die er spielte, und stellte die Stücksituationen in einen solchen Sehwinkel, daß sie Gegenstand der Kritik der Zuschauer werden mußten. (*GBA* 22.1, pp. 370-71)

Developing an idea which he had already referred to in the poem 'Über alltägliches Theater', Brecht takes the example of a street accident to illustrate the actor's relationship to his role and his task as demonstrator:¹⁴⁰

Steht dort den Mann an der Straßenecke! Er zeigt, wie
Der Unfall vor sich ging. Gerade
Überliefert er den Fahrer dem Urteil der Menge. Wie der
Hinter der Steuerung saß, und jetzt
Ahmt er den Überfahrenen nach, anscheinend
Einen alten Mann. Von beiden gibt er
Nur so viel, daß der Unfall verständlich wird, und doch
Genug, daß sie vor euren Augen erscheinen. (GBA 22.2, p. 858)

In presenting the incident to a group of bystanders and imitating the actions of those involved, the demonstrator enables his 'audience' to draw conclusions from what they have been shown:

Der Augenzeuge eines Verkehrsunfalls demonstriert einer Menschenansammlung, wie das Unglück passierte. Die Umstehenden können den Vorgang nicht gesehen haben oder nur nicht seiner Meinung sein, ihn »anders sehen« – die Hauptsache ist, daß der Demonstrierende das Verhalten des Fahrers oder des Überfahrenen oder beider in einer solchen Weise vormacht, daß die Umstehenden sich über den Unfall ein Urteil bilden können. (GBA 22.1, p. 371)

Although it is not clear whether Brecht composed 'Die Straßenszene' with *An Actor Prepares* in mind, the text nonetheless has an obvious counterpart in the

¹⁴⁰ It is possible that Brecht may have got the initial idea for the street-scene paradigm from Sergei Tretiakov. During the discussion which had taken place in Moscow in April 1935 in honour of Mei Lan-fang's 'Gastspiel', Tretiakov had used a street-scene analogy to characterise the Chinese performance approach: "Hat man sich als Ausländer ein wenig an das chinesische Theater gewöhnt, beginnt man bald, die Gestik und den Tonfall der Bühne in jedem Gespräch zwischen zwei Chinesen wiederzuerkennen, in jener Straßenszene mit all ihren meisterhaft beherrschten Verbeugungen, Begrüßungen, Schritten und Handbewegungen." Lars Kleberg, 'Die Zauberlehrlinge', p. 76. Brecht's first reference to the street-scene model occurs in the poem 'Über alltägliches Theater', written later that year.

tram accident referred to in the chapter on 'emotion memory'. Endeavouring to recall the details surrounding the episode, the student in Stanislavski's example finds that, much to his surprise, his memory of the experience has been displaced by the more powerful recollection of an earlier event from his past:

It was long ago – I came upon an Italian, leaning over a dead monkey on the sidewalk. He was weeping and trying to push a bit of orange rind into the animal's mouth. It would seem that this scene had affected my feelings more than the death of the beggar [...]. I think if I had to stage the street accident I would search for emotional material for my part in my memory of the scene of the Italian with the dead monkey rather than in the tragedy itself.¹⁴¹

Considered alongside one another, the two episodes highlight the difference between Brecht's and Stanislavski's perception of *observation* as a form of actor preparation. Stanislavski's student draws upon the incident from a purely self-referential and apolitical standpoint, identifying its potential as an emotional trigger for a "condensed, deeper and broader sensation memory of related experience"¹⁴² which may later be projected onto the audience. In contrast, 'Die Straßenszene' presents a *constructed* model rather than a *recalled* incident and demonstrates the principles of Epic Theatre as exemplified in an everyday event, suggesting that 'Verfremdung' is a phenomenon which occurs regularly in daily life.¹⁴³ Acting as a 'Kontrafaktur' to Stanislavski's example, Brecht's street-corner demonstration urges the actor to observe beyond the 'given circumstances' and

¹⁴¹ Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 172.

¹⁴² Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 173.

¹⁴³ In 'Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt' Brecht refers to the act of 'Verfremdung' as "eine Prozedur des täglichen Lebens". The technique consists of turning the familiar and everyday into something striking and unusual: "Es wird, wie tausendfach, bescheiden, populär es sein mag, nunmehr zu etwas Ungewöhnlichem gestempelt" (*GBA* 22.2, p. 655).

consider the significance of the scene from a political and ‘gesellschaftlich praktische’ perspective. Its purpose is to deliver political insights – a function which has no equivalent in Stanislavski’s ‘street scene’:

Die Wichtigkeit der schauspielerischen Darstellung des Unfalls [...] ist, dass der Unfall Menschenwerk und damit ein soziales Ereignis ist. Die am Unfall Beteiligten sind Produkte sozialer Verhältnisse, und die Demonstration muss daher zweckgerichtet sein, beherrscht von unterschiedlichen Interessen.¹⁴⁴

Though not preventing the emotional participation of either the actor or audience, Brecht’s street-corner model nonetheless determines:

welcher Art das *Erlebnis* zu sein hat, das dem Zuschauer bereitet wird. Der Straßendemonstrant hat ohne Zweifel ein »Erlebnis« hinter sich, aber er ist doch nicht darauf aus, seine Demonstration zu einem »Erlebnis« der Zuschauer zu machen [...]. Er ist nicht auf Erzeugung purer *Emotionen* aus. (GBA 22.1, pp. 372-73)

Whilst the audience is not excluded from sharing any experience that is placed before it, the street-scene model proposes a technique that aims to submit such emotions to the spectator’s criticism. Thus, during a performance the actor should preserve a distance from his role, reproducing the tone of the subject he is demonstrating “mit einer gewissen Reserve” and degree of detachment (GBA 22.1, p. 376). Emphasising the “Charakter der Wiederholung”, the actor sees to it that performance is ‘historisiert’ by ensuring that both the element of rehearsal and the learning by heart of the lines is apparent in his portrayal. As a result, Oesmann explains, “wird die experimentelle Darstellung zu einer retrospektiven Beurteilung des Ereignisses”:¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB4*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB4*, p. 8. Similarly in *Der Messingkauf* the *Philosoph* reiterates the importance of the “Charakter der Wiederholung” to the actor’s performance: “Der Schauspieler beseitigt die Spuren des Theaters, wenn er den Zuschauer vergessen macht, daß er schon vorher

Das Ereignis hatt stattgefunden, hier findet die Wiederholung statt. Folgt die *Theaterszene* hierin der *Straßenszene*, dann verbirgt das Theater nicht mehr, das es Theater ist, so wie die Demonstration an der Straßenecke nicht verbirgt, daß sie Demonstration [...] ist. Das Geprobte am Spiel tritt voll in Erscheinung, das auswendig Gelernte am Text, der ganze Apparat und die ganze Vorbereitung. (GBA 22.1, p. 372)

Thus, the conventional “Bereitung der *Illusion*” on stage – the notion of a fourth wall – is thwarted and characters and events are subsequently revealed as *fiction* (in fact, taking place outside on an uncontained street, the ‘Straßenszene’ represents a deliberate, geographical ‘Kontrafaktur’ to the aesthetic fourth-wall convention). Able to think beyond the confines of the suggested play-world, the actor is encouraged to demonstrate his own attitude towards the character. In contrast to the Stanislavskian actor who approaches the part in the first-person, ensuring that his performance is effectively psychologised through the use of ‘emotion memory’, Brecht recommends that the actor continuously emphasise the third-person element in his presentation of the role in order that his performance will be ‘historisiert’:

Kurz gesagt: der Schauspieler muß Demonstrant bleiben; er muß den Demonstrierten als eine fremde Person wiedergeben, er darf bei seiner Darstellung nicht das »er tat das, er sagte das« auslöschen. (GBA 22.1, p. 376)

Rejecting the Stanislavskian actor’s goal of total transformation, Brecht suggests that the actor adopt a dual perspective on stage – behaving naturally in his role as demonstrator whilst at the same time allowing the subject of his demonstration to behave naturally too. Thus, the actor incorporates the “unvermittelte Übergang von der Darstellung zum Kommentar” in his performance, interrupting his

gespielt hat, was er nun spielt, daß er den Text nur gelernt hat, kurz, wenn er glauben macht, er erlebe alles gerade jetzt” (GBA 22.2, p. 761)

“Imitation mit Erklärungen” and “das Sich-direkt-an-die-Zuschauer-Wenden” (GBA 22.1, p. 378). Indentificatory, Stanislavskian methods are implied in Brecht’s *ex negativo* description of what the actor *does not* do:

Er darf es nicht zur *restlosen Verwandlung* in die demonstrierte Person kommen lassen [...]. Er vergißt nie und gestattet nie, zu vergessen, daß er nicht der Demonstrierte, sondern der Demonstrant ist. Das heißt: was das Publikum sieht, ist nicht eine Fusion zwischen Demonstrant und Demonstriertem, nicht ein selbständiges, widerspruchloses Drittes mit aufgelösten Konturen von 1 (Demonstrant) und 2 (Demonstriertem), wie das uns gewohnte Theater es uns in seinen Produktionen darbietet. (GBA 22.1, pp. 376-77)

In much the same way as he formulates ‘Kontrafakturen’ as theoretical alternatives to the dominant discourse, Brecht’s strategy of arguing a point *ex negativo* is both a rhetorical device and a valid form of ‘reception’. Accompanied by the footnote ‘Am klarsten entwickelt durch Stanislawski’, the extract uses Stanislavskian performance methodology as an antithetical model to illustrate what the Epic actor *does not* aim to do. The audience, Brecht states, should not witness “eine Fusion zwischen Demonstrant und Demonstriertem” in the Stanislavskian sense, rather, the actor’s attitude appears ‘twofold’ – “er trägt ständig zwei Situationen Rechnung”. Yet, as Stanislavski’s later books *Building A Character* and *Creating A Role* show, by the 1930s the Soviet director had begun to examine the notion of the actor’s *perspective* on stage. The actor, Stanislavski states in *Building A Character*, is “split into two parts when he is acting [...]. The one is the perspective of the role. The other is the perspective of the actor”.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character* trans. by E. Reynolds Hapgood (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 173.

Brecht's comments in 'Die Straßenszene' touch on an area of Stanislavskian methodology to which he would later return in the 'Stanislawski-Studien', written in 1953 in conjunction with the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz'.

Representing a "Grenzfestlegung für die gerechtfertigte Imitation" (*GBA* 22.2, p. 615), the street-corner model discourages any attempt to suggest that the demonstrator and character are synonymous. Drawing on similarly satirical terminology to that which he had used to criticise Stanislavski's stagecraft in 'Das verräterische Vokabular', Brecht maintains that the demonstrator must avoid creating a dramatic illusion, thus taking care not to 'cast a spell' over the audience:

Er hat es zu vermeiden, sich so aufzuführen, daß jemand ausruft: Wie lebenswahr stellt er doch einen Chauffeur dar! Er hat niemandem »in seinen Bann zu ziehen«. Er soll niemanden aus dem Alltag in »eine höhere Sphäre« locken. Er braucht nicht über besonders suggestive Fähigkeiten zu verfügen. (*GBA* 22.1, p. 372)

With clear reference to the deceptive artifice of the Stanislavskian actor's approach to a role, in 'Vorwort (über ernsthafte Bemühungen um das Theater)' (*GBA* 22.1, pp. 381-83) – a note presumably written in conjunction with 'Die Straßenszene' – Brecht contrasts his own practice with the school of actors who aspire to induce the audience to forget that they are in a theatre. Ensuring that an actor's performance should not be exposed as "ein paar Pfund schlecht verrührte Mimik [...] eine schnell zusammengemischte Ware für den Verkauf im Dunkeln" (a commodity metaphor which reiterates a point familiar from 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst'), this school of

approach instructs the performer in an ‘Einfühlungstechnik’ which will enable him to conceal the elements of his art from the audience:

Der in diesen Schulen erzogene Schauspieler fürchtet fortgesetzt, bei seiner Technik ertappt zu werden wie bei einem Täuschungsversuch. Er hört sein Publikum sagen: Eben noch dachte ich, er sei der König Richard, aber jetzt hat er sich entlarvt, der Bursche, als Betrüger: er ist nur ein Schauspieler. Diese Furcht teilen sie mit dem Taschenspieler, der bange sein muß, daß das Publikum seinen »Trick« entdeckt. (GBA 22.1, p. 383)

Epic Theatre disposes of this – as Brecht would put it in ‘Über experimentelles Theater’ – “ganze Zauberbox”, proposing an alternative theatrical model which, aimed at subverting the suggestive “Bann der Bühne”, opposes a technical apparatus and acting approach “der eher Illusionen als Erfahrungen, eher Täuschung als Aufklärung erzeugen konnte” (GBA 22.1, p. 548). Absorbed in an empathic relationship with the central character, the spectator shares their perspective and is only able to perceive as much as the character according to the ‘given circumstances’ of the play – a factor which, Brecht argued, excludes any possibility of the spectator’s taking issue with the character from a socially-critical standpoint.

Contrasting the effect of the orthodox, Stanislavskian ‘Einfühlungstechnik’ on the spectator with his own ‘Verfremdungstechnik’, Brecht cites the following example:

Nehmen wir [...] den Zorn des Lear über die Undankbarkeit seiner Töchter. Vermittels der Einfühlungstechnik kann der Schauspieler diesen Zorn so darstellen, daß der Zuschauer ihn für die natürlichste Sache der Welt ansieht, daß er sich gar nicht vorstellen kann, wie Lear nicht zornig werden könnte, daß er mit Lear völlig solidarisch ist, ganz und gar mit ihm mitfühlt, selber in Zorn verfällt. Vermittels der Verfremdungstechnik hingegen stellt der Schauspieler diesen Learschen Zorn so dar,

daß der Zuschauer über ihn staunen kann, daß er sich noch andere Reaktionen des Lear vorstellen kann als gerade die des Zornes. (GBA 22.1, p. 554)

In orthodox, Stanislavskian theatre Lear's behaviour is portrayed as natural and unavoidable. 'Historisiert' by means of the 'Verfremdungstechnik', Lear's behaviour becomes something striking and remarkable – a social phenomenon which, though human, is neither inevitable nor universal.

Composed shortly after 'Die Straßenszene' at the beginning of 1940, the 'Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt', represents a rigorous attempt by Brecht to expound the new "terminus technicus" to which he had referred in connection with his abortive proposals for the 'Diderot-Gesellschaft'. The aim is a systematic explanation of the technical aspect of 'Verfremdung' which, regarded in the light of his encounter with the American theatrical left with its preference for Stanislavski's approach and in the context of a potential exile in America, reads increasingly like a preparatory effort by Brecht to refine his own theoretical system. Brecht's confidant Eric Bentley states that the 'Kurze Beschreibung' suggests what the actor should do to "emancipate himself from the Stanislavsky procedure."¹⁴⁷ Emphasising *performance* technique, the text demonstrates a new awareness of both the actor's rehearsal and preparatory methods, and would thus appear to have been formulated by Brecht in an attempt to bring his own methodology 'in Ordnung' as a structured alternative to Stanislavski's practice. Moreover, with its systemised 'Anhang' and elaborate technical terminology – the

¹⁴⁷ Eric Bentley, *The Brecht Commentaries 1943-1980* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), p. 66.

‘Gestus des Zeigens’, ‘Fixieren des *Nicht-Sondern*’, ‘Historisierung’ and the ‘kombinierte Verfahren’ of presenting the part in the third person – the note proposes systematic ‘Kontrafakturen’ to Stanislavski’s performance techniques and is thus central to an understanding of Brecht’s reception of the System.

Significantly, the text once again reflects the fact that Brecht’s perception of Stanislavski’s methodology at that time was largely dependent, perhaps deliberately so, on early interpretations of the Soviet approach. Whilst the only direct reference to Stanislavski occurs in the appendix, the implications of the piece are nonetheless clearly conveyed in terms which, consistent with previous Stanislavski commentaries, amount to a “Verzicht auf alles Mystische, das dem üblichen Theater noch aus alten Zeiten anhaftet” (*GBA* 22.2, p. 647). As Brecht’s introductory remarks point out, the ‘V-Effekt’ is diametrically opposed to any theatrical approach aimed exclusively at provoking empathy.¹⁴⁸ The preparatory techniques proposed by Brecht in the ‘Kurze Beschreibung’ are all connected by the concept of ‘das komplexe Sehen’: what appears ‘natural’ or self-evident must be made to appear strange in order that it may be critiqued.¹⁴⁹ In stripping the familiar of its inevitable and obvious quality and transforming it into something striking and unexpected, the ‘V-Effekt’ represents an alternative to the theatre of total identification, directly counteracting the tendency, on behalf of both actor

¹⁴⁸ In fact, Brecht uses the term ‘V-Effekt’ in two senses here: as a theatrical device which, as a theoretical alternative to Stanislavski’s methods, is aimed controlling the audience’s empathic reaction, and as the end itself – that is, the critical distance which the spectator develops.

¹⁴⁹ The term ‘das komplexe Sehen’ originates from the ‘Anmerkungen zur »Dreigroschenoper«’ (*GBA* 22.1, p. 59).

and audience, to habitually accept the 'given circumstances' of a particular situation or act. Again, Brecht explains *ex negativo*, how the empathic exchange that takes place between the character and audience is hindered as the actor is not totally transformed into the role on stage:

Der Schauspieler läßt es auf der Bühne nicht zur *restlosen Verwandlung* in die darzustellende Person kommen. Er ist nicht Lear, Harpagon, Schwejk, er *zeigt* diese Leute. Er bringt ihre Aussprüche so echt wie möglich, er führt ihre Verhaltensweise vor, so gut es ihm seine Menschenkenntnis erlaubt, aber er versucht nicht, sich (und dadurch ändern) einzubilden, er habe sich hiermit restlos verwandelt (*GBA* 22.2, p. 643).

Rather than entailing working on the role from a prior vantage point, the rehearsal strategies outlined in the 'Kurze Beschreibung' represent a conditioning *preparatory* process with which the actor engages during rehearsal. The technique of presenting the part in the third person enables the actor to prevent the audience from believing that his own emotions are synonymous with those experienced by the character. The actor merely 'indicates' the role and by doing so suggests that he does not necessarily share the character's perspective. Instead he retains the attitude of someone making suggestions. Unlike the Stanislavskian performer, who absorbs "all stage directions into a living illusion of the actual thing",¹⁵⁰ the 'composite process' of 'Verfremdung' is achieved by the actor speaking the stage directions aloud and transposing them into the past during rehearsal:

Drei Hilfsmittel können bei einer Spielweise mit nicht restloser Verwandlung zu einer Verfremdung der Äußerungen und Handlungen der darzustellenden Person dienen:

1. *Die Überführung in die dritte Person.*

¹⁵⁰ Eric Bentley, *The Brecht Commentaries 1943-1980*, p. 242.

2. *Die Überführung in die Vergangenheit.*

3. *Das Mitsprechen von Spielanweisungen und Kommentaren.* (GBA 22.2, p. 644)

“Das Setzen der Er-Form und der Vergangenheit”, Brecht informs us, “ermöglicht dem Schauspieler die richtige distanzierte Haltung. Der Schauspieler sucht außerdem Spielanweisungen und kommentarische Äußerungen zu seinem Text und spricht sie auf der Probe mit”, thereby ensuring the ‘Historisierung’ of the material (GBA 22.2, p. 644). Transposing the dialogue into the third person also has a historicizing effect, as it is now the *past* actions of another that are being relayed. The emphasis is not on self-expression – on a convincingly *psychologised* performance – but on endowing the proceedings with a sense of the *past*. This distance is preserved in the performance as the actor endows each of his actions with, what Brecht calls, “dem deutlichen Gestus des Zeigens” (GBA 22.2, p. 641) – a technique borrowed from Chinese theatre by Brecht and formulated as a ‘Kontrafaktur’ to the Stanislavskian actor’s metamorphosis into the character on stage:

[Der Schauspieler] wird einen anderen Menschen nachmachen, aber nicht so, nicht in einem solchen Grade, als sei er dieser Mensch, nicht mit dem Vorhaben, sich selber dabei vergessen zu machen. (GBA 22.2, p. 649)

On the contrary, the Brechtian actor addresses the audience directly and makes no attempt to conceal either the fact that events are not occurring spontaneously or that the text has been memorised.

In order that social phenomena are no longer presented as natural, eternal and predestined, Brecht recommends that the technique of ‘Historisierung’ be

incorporated into the way in which the actor portrays the character. 'Historisierung' thus becomes a *performance* technique which, unlike the Stanislavskian actor's total transformation into the role, prevents the impression that the events are taking place in the immediate present or that the actor-as-character is witnessing them for the first and only time. Instead, the actor portrays incidents as historical events – transitory and related to specific periods in the past:

Der Schauspieler muß die Vorgänge als historische Vorgänge spielen. Das Verhalten [...] hat durch den Gang der Geschichte Überholtes und Überholbares und ist der Kritik vom Standpunkt der jeweilig darauffolgenden Epoche aus unterworfen. Die ständige Entwicklung entfremdet uns das Verhalten der vor uns Geborenen. (GBA 22.2, p. 646)

Aware that what he is watching is not a series of spontaneous incidents, the spectator is discouraged from regarding them as beyond alteration, or the conduct of those involved as universally human. Rather, human behaviour and social situations are shown as variable and therefore open to change. Plays dealing with contemporary issues are 'historisiert', encouraging the audience to re-examine the underlying socio-political conditions which define their own circumstances. As Brecht had suggested in 'Über experimentelles Theater', the technical device of 'Historisierung' invites spectators both to review what they had previously taken for granted and to conceive of a different set of conditions under which the characters would behave in a different way. No longer the helpless victim of vulgar determinism, the spectator is now "der große Änderer" – in control of his own reality and newly aware of the socio-historical processes which define it:

der Zuschauer [...] sieht: dieser Mensch ist so und so, weil die Verhältnisse so und so sind. Und die Verhältnisse sind so und so, weil der Mensch so und so ist. Er ist

aber nicht nur so vorstellbar, wie er ist, sondern auch anders, so wie er sein könnte, und auch *die Verhältnisse sind anders vorstellbar, als sie sind.* (GBA 22.1, p. 555)
[Emphasis mine]

Quoting a comment made by the actor Poul Reumert, one of the most renowned Danish actors at that time and a devotee of the naturalistic school of acting, Brecht reiterated his criticism of the process of emotional ‘contagion’ central to conventional, Stanislavskian performance techniques:

Wenn ich fühle, daß ich *sterbe*, wenn ich das *wirklich* fühle, dann fühlen auch alle anderen das; wenn ich tue, als ob ich einen Dolch in meiner Hand habe und ganz erfüllt bin von dem einen Gedanken, daß ich das Kind töten will, so schauern alle dabei [...]. Das Ganze ist eine Frage der Gedankentätigkeit, die durch Gefühle vermittelt wird [...]. Glückt es, so ist es das Ansteckendste von allem in der Welt, und dann ist all das Äußere komplett gleichgültig. (GBA 22.2, p. 649)

The citation appears in the appendix alongside the extract from Rapoport’s article, previously referred to by Brecht in the collection of Stanislavski notes written during 1937:

Take any object, a cap for example; lay it on the table or on the floor and try to regard it as though it were a rat; make believe that it is a rat, and not, a cap...Picture what sort of rat it is, what size, colour? ...We thus commit ourselves to believe quite naively that the object before us is something other than it is and, at the same time, learn to compel the audience to believe. (GBA 22.2, pp. 649-50)

Brecht’s reaction to the empathic methods proposed by both accounts amounts to a derisive display of scepticism regarding the suitability of such illusory techniques for the effective dissemination of socio-political truths in the theatre. Again the ensuing use of the phrase ‘Stanislawski-Methode’ suggests a convenient synonymy between Stanislavski’s ‘System’ and the American ‘Method’:

Man könnte meinen, dies sei ein Kursus im Zaubern, aber es ist ein Kursus für Schauspielerkunst, angeblich nach der Stanislawski-Methode. Man fragte sich, ob

eine Technik, welche einen befähigt, das Publikum da Ratten sehen zu machen, wo keine sind, wirklich so geeignet sein kann, die Wahrheit zu verbreiten? (*GBA* 22.2, p. 650)

The implication is that ‘Wahrheit’ of this kind has little to do with real social truth. On the contrary, Epic Theatre does not employ disingenuous techniques or create “»hypnotischen Felder«” in an attempt to deceive its audience into believing that the stage action is taking place in the immediate present. Rather than sweeping them away by the “Atmosphäre eines bestimmten Raumes auf der Bühne (Abendliches Zimmer, Straße im Herbst)” it teaches the audience to query the inevitability of that which Stanislavskian theatre presents as ‘given’ (*GBA* 22.2, p. 641). Brecht’s subsequent observation takes a further satirical swipe at the intoxicating effect of Stanislavskian theatre practice, suggesting an ironic alternative to ‘das komplexe Sehen’ – the very aim of the ‘Verfremdungseffekte’: “Ohne alle Schauspielkunst, mit genug Alkohol, kann man beinahe jeden dazu bringen, überall wenn nicht Ratten, so doch weiße Mäuse zu sehen” (*GBA* 22.2, p. 650).

In order to prevent a total synthesis between performer and character taking place on stage, the Brechtian actor is encouraged to incorporate into the performance all of the astonishment and contradiction he had experienced on first reading the play, thereby adopting a “gesellschaftskritischer Standpunkt” *vis-à-vis* the part. Presenting a character whose actions are open to question, the actor ensures that nothing is ‘given’ or portrayed as inevitable. Conveying his own *version* of the character, the actor effectively communicates two levels of

experience, thus once again undermining the fixed inevitability of Stanislavski's 'given circumstances':

Nicht nur das Zustandekommen der Vorgänge [...] auch das Verhalten seiner Rollenfigur, das er erfährt, muß er auf die Waagschale liegen, in ihrer Besonderheit begreifen; keine darf er als gegeben, als eine, die »gar nicht anders ausfallen konnte«, die »bei dem Charakter dieser Person erwartet werden müßte«, hinnehmen.
(GBA 22.2, pp. 642-43)

In order to promote a comparably critical attitude in the audience, Brecht recommends that the actor's performance should at all times imply an alternative set of actions and responses "so, daß sein Spiel noch die anderen Möglichkeiten ahnen läßt, nur eine der möglichen Varianten darstellt" (GBA 22.2, p. 643). Brecht called this the 'Nicht-Sondern-Modell' – a 'Kontrafaktur' to the Stanislavskian actor's task of *living* the part according to the character's 'given circumstances'. Following Brecht's model, the actor appears on stage in a double role and communicates alternatives to the 'given circumstances'. Indeed, its disparity with Stanislavski's early assertions concerning the actor's synonymy with the character is unmistakable: "You will come to feel that, given the circumstances, the opinions, the social position of the character you are playing, you would be bound to act as he did".¹⁵¹ In contrast the Brechtian actor's presentation of the character represents just *one* of various possible alternatives. In order to prevent the actor identifying with the role whilst on stage, Brecht suggests the externalisation of emotion. The actor is encouraged to express the character's emotions as socially significant gestures:

alles Gefühlsmäßige [muß] nach außen gebracht werden [...] das heißt, es ist zur Geste zu entwickeln. Der Schauspieler muß einen sinnfälligen, äußeren Ausdruck für

¹⁵¹ Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 305.

die Emotionen seiner Person finden, womöglich eine Handlung, die jene inneren Vorgänge in ihm verrät. (GBA 22.2, p. 654)

It is not difficult to identify some areas in which this proposal begins to overlap with Stanislavski's later work on the 'method of physical action' – indeed, Brecht's statement indicates that the Soviet technique is far nearer to his own dramatic intentions than any of the introspective psycho-techniques that preceded it. Whilst the extent of Brecht's familiarity at this time with Stanislavski's later work on the psycho-physical nature of performance is unclear, his comments on the actor's physical externalisation of emotion significantly predate his apparent 'reappraisal' of Stanislavski's methods in the 1950s on the basis of recent published material.

'Einfühlung' as a preparatory performance technique

Brecht's suggestion in the 'Kurze Beschreibung' that the actor make use of the "psychischen Akt" of identification with the character during his imaginative work on a role (GBA 22.2, p. 642) is significant and anticipates his more detailed statements on 'Einfühlung' as a *preparatory* performance technique. Brecht proposes that the actor explore the psychological process of living the part *during rehearsals* as a preparation strategy. The 'Kurze Beschreibung' suggests that, at a certain stage in their creative work on a role, actors in the Epic Theatre are likewise encouraged to "fühlen [...] sich [...] in die Personen ein, um ihre Eigenheiten sich anzueignen":

Er wird aber, im Gegensatz zu der üblichen Art des Theaterspielens, wo der Akt bei der Vorführung selber vollzogen wird, und zwar zu dem Zweck, den Zuschauer zu einem gleichen Akt zu bewegen, den Akt der Einfühlung nur in einem Vorstadium,

irgendwann bei der Rollenarbeit in den Proben, vollziehen. (GBA 22.2, p. 642)

[Emphasis mine]

The cursory reference to the actor's identification with a role '*bei der Rollenarbeit*' in '*Kurze Beschreibung*' precedes a more detailed examination of '*Einfühlung*' as a preparatory characterisation technique in [B161] – an untitled fragment from the First Night *Messingkauf* texts written during 1941-43. Significantly both pieces indicate that Brecht recognised that there was a place for '*Einfühlung*' as a rehearsal procedure more than a decade before '*Stanislawski-Studien [3]*' which was composed in the run-up to the 1953 '*Stanislawski-Konferenz*'.

In 1939 Brecht had begun work on *Der Messingkauf* with the aim of condensing his practical formulations for a systematic theory of Epic Theatre into one work. Reinforcing the performance proposals articulated in the texts of the late 1930s, the fragmentary notes and dialogues which comprise *Der Messingkauf* are vital to an understanding of Brecht's reception of Stanislavski's systematic acting approach. *Der Messingkauf* indicates the continued process of theoretical reformulation that Brecht was engaged in, in reaction to Stanislavski's System. Drawing on satirical terminology familiar from the Stanislavski notes composed in 1937, *Der Messingkauf* refers to the actor as a "*Diener des Wortes*" and to art as a temple in which 'divine' productions are played out in front of an 'enthralled' audience (GBA 22.2, p. 709).¹⁵² Brecht's intention is the "*Säkularisierung der alten kultischen Institution*" (GBA 22.2, p. 702) in order that a new type of theatre

¹⁵² Stanislavski himself uses the term 'servants of the word' to describe actors in *My Life in Art*, p. 354.

may be developed. Alluding to the primitive and cultic nature of bourgeois theatre, Brecht compares the performances to:

barbarische Kriegstänze im Dienst obskurer und obszöner Kulte, faulen Zauber, Magie, Teufelsmessen [...]. Die Kunst treibt einen Kult mit dem Unverständlichen. Sie berauscht sich an dem »Faktum«, daß es Dinge gibt, die über dem Verstand liegen, jenseits des Beherrschbaren sind. Sie steht auf seiten des Schicksals. (GBA 22.2, p. 709 and p. 726)

Stressing the fact that a fundamental change needed to be brought about in the nature of the traffic between the stage and auditorium, in 'Nachtrag zur Theorie des »Messingkaufs« [A9]' Brecht reiterates the point that the actor's role is that of demonstrator, who, in laying bare "das Sichüberschneiden der beiden Gesichter" (GBA 22.2, p. 740), ensures that the spectator:

wird nicht völlig »in Bann gezogen«, seelisch nicht gleichgeschaltet, nicht in eine fatalistische Stimmung dem vorgeführten Schicksal gegenüber gebracht. (Er kann Zorn empfinden, wo die Bühnenfigur Freude empfindet usw. Es ist ihm freigestellt [...] sich einen andern Verlauf vorzustellen oder einen andern Verlauf zu suchen.) (GBA 22.2, p. 701)

Indeed, characters should be presented as "wandelnde Rohstoffe" – imprecise, contradictory and capable of astounding the audience, and not, as the Actor in a fragment from the 'zweite Nacht' suggests, bound by either the 'given circumstances' of the character's behaviour or the causal certainty of a predetermined 'through-line' of action. An entrenched Stanislavskian, the Actor's role here – and indeed throughout *Der Messingkauf* – is that of *foil* to the Philosopher:

DER SCHAUSPIELER: Den Typ, der in Zorn verfällt, lege ich eben von Anfang an so an. Der Anfall muß ja logisch kommen, mit anderen Äußerungen

zusammenstimmen, aus dem Gang des Ganzen hervorgehen. *Mein Mann* verfällt in Zorn, das wird jedermann begreifen. (GBA 22.2, p. 727)

The Stanislavskian notion of a smooth, sequential ‘through-line’ of motivations is rejected by the Philosopher who, as the closest representative of Brecht’s own viewpoint, asserts that, in real life, motive causes lie outside and inevitably lead to “Wendungen [...], die aus dem vorne gegebenen Material nicht erklärbar sind” (GBA 22.2, pp. 722-23). Drawing on the acting proposals outlined in the ‘Kurze Beschreibung’, the Philosopher states that the actor must ensure that his actions continually imply alternatives. Undermining the incontrovertibility of Stanislavski’s ‘given circumstances’, the actor is, in contrast, encouraged to incorporate the ‘Nicht-Sondern’ element into his performance – presenting the character in such a way “daß man sie auch anders handelnd sich vorstellen kann, als sie handeln, selbst wenn genügend Gründe vorliegen, daß sie eben so handeln” (GBA 22.2, p. 737). Such a technique also ensures that the transfer of direct sensations to the audience is restricted.¹⁵³ Accordingly, the Philosopher rejects the notion of ‘contagious’, transferable emotions within the theatre:

DER DRAMATURG: Wie ist es mit den direkten Gemütsbewegungen, die sich übertragen? So, daß durch abscheuliche Handlungen Abscheu erzeugt wird oder durch Abscheu, den man miterlebt, der einige Abscheu verstärkt wird?

DER PHILOSOPH: Der Fall, daß durch abscheuliche Vorfälle (in der Wiedergabe) Abscheu erregt werden kann, gehört nicht hierher, solange nicht, wie es auf dem Theater geschieht, dieser Abscheu auf der Bühne durch eine Person stark und ansteckend ausgedrückt wird. Dann gelten einige Erfahrungen, welche die neuere Physiologie gemacht hat. Kennt ihr die Experimente des Physiologen Pawlow? Mit

¹⁵³ In ‘Gespräch über die Nötigung zur Einfühlung’, Brecht uses the word ‘transportabel’ as the pejorative term for this process, rejecting the tendency of orthodox theatre to fob the audience off with emotions which have been detached from their cause and transferred to some other cause, as a “barbarischer Vorgang” (GBA 23, p. 412).

den Hunden? (*GBA* 22.2, pp. 713-14)

The audience, the Philosopher states with ironic reference to Pavlov's well-known canine experiments on the stimulation of sensory reflexes, "sind keine Hunde, wiewohl ihr auf dem Theater sie als solche behandelt":

DER PHILOSOPH: Eure Zuschauer erleben sehr komplexe, vielfältige reiche Vorfälle, die man denen der Hunde des Pawlow vergleichen kann: Fütterungen unter Glockengeläute. Es könnte sein, daß die erstrebten Reaktionen dann bei Vorfällen im Leben eintreten, welche nur bestimmte Elemente der bei euch erlebten enthalten, vielleicht die begleitenden Elemente. (*GBA* 22.2, p. 714)

As Klaus-Dieter Krabiel explains, the Philosopher applies the Pavlovian analogy for purely satirical purposes, to indicate how the audience, confronted with "komplexen Vorfällen auf dem Theater [...] könnten [...] ähnlich falsch reagieren. Sie hätten im Theater Falsches gelernt."¹⁵⁴ The implication is that such procedures are not only deceptive, but fundamentally barbaric: "Ihr hättet sie dann krank gemacht, wie Pawlow seine Hunde" (*GBA* 22.2, p. 714).

Brecht's treatment of 'Einfühlung' as a preparatory performance technique in *Der Messingkauf* is central to our study and throws up a number of very significant new perspectives, presenting, as John J. White suggests, "a more nuanced assessment of Stanislavski's importance, as well as a recognition of the reasons why he cannot simply be demonised".¹⁵⁵ One of the key fragments is an essay entitled 'Einfühlung' from the First Night texts written during 1941-43. Offering a more differentiated handling of the role of actor/character engagement in Epic Theatre than merely an outright rejection of the process, the essay sheds

¹⁵⁴ Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB4*, p. 198.

¹⁵⁵ John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, p. 292.

new light on Brecht's reception of Stanislavski's theatre of identification. Brecht begins by acknowledging Stanislavski's attempts to theorise an organised performance practice. Yet this recognition of the Soviet practitioner's achievements is instantly relativised by the accusation that Stanislavski ultimately fails to question the role of 'Einfühlung' in his theatre:

Stanislawski, dem das Verdienst zusteht, diesen Akt beinahe wissenschaftlich exakt untersucht [...] hält es nirgends für nötig, ihn gegen Kritik irgendwelcher Art zu verteidigen: er ist auf solche Kritik überhaupt nicht gefaßt. (*GBA* 22.2, p. 785)

The implications of Brecht's statement are twofold. Stanislavski's inability to examine the application of 'Einfühlung' in his theatre is considered a failing "because the method will remain insufficiently theorised and assessed in terms of its socio-political function", whilst his definition of empathy as a "Phänomen, das [...] ganz untrennbar zur Kunst gehört" (*GBA* 22.2, p. 785) renders any attempt to undermine its role in the theatre as "tantamount to aesthetic heresy".¹⁵⁶ Describing Stanislavski's use of imitation techniques "welche die *Wahrheit* des Spiels garantieren soll" (*GBA* 22.2, p. 785), Brecht's illustration points to the difference between Stanislavski's notion of 'Wahrheit' as surface verisimilitude which consists in giving imitation "den Stempel der Wahrhaftigkeit" (*GBA* 22.2, p. 776), and the mediation of socially insightful truth:

Das Verhalten der Schauspieler auf der Bühne soll sich in nichts, nicht im kleinsten Detail, von dem Verhalten der Menschen im wirklichen Leben unterscheiden. Durch einen besonderen psychischen Akt der Einfühlung in die darzustellende Person bringt es der Schauspieler zu minutiösen Imitationen der Reaktionen lebender Menschen. Dieser psychische Akt besteht aus einer tiefen Selbstversenkung, in welcher der Schauspieler sich in die Seele der darzustellenden Person »einlebt«, sich selber so restlos in diese Person verwandelnd, welcher Akt, richtig ausgeführt, vom

¹⁵⁶ John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, p. 292.

Zuschauer dann mitgemacht wird, so daß auch dieser sich restlos in die vorgeführte Person einleben kann. (GBA 22.2, p. 785)

The Stanislavskian actor, whose total synthesis with a role during the performance effects a process of inevitable 'emotionelle Ansteckung' upon the audience, ensures that the spectator is allowed to understand only as much as the character in the 'given circumstances', thereby inhibiting the development of political insight:

Er gerät selber in Zorn oder Eifersucht, versteht sozusagen gar nicht mehr, wie man nicht in Zorn oder Eifersucht geraten könnte, und wird so desinteressiert am Kausalnexus dieser »natürlichen«, d.h. gegebenen, nicht weiter zu untersuchenden Emotionen. (GBA 22.2, p. 786)

Precluding any attempt to penetrate beyond the surface façade of authenticity, superficial verisimilitude of this kind has little in common with real 'truth'. In fact, it is not difficult, Brecht euphemistically concludes, to see how such imitations are socially insufficient:

Es ist jedoch nicht schwer, einzusehen, daß eine solche Wahrheit nicht schon ohne weiteres alle Fragen beantwortet, die gestellt werden können. (GBA 22.2, p. 786)

A short dialogic exchange between the Actor and Philosopher in a further, unassigned *Messingkauf* fragment reinforces this point. The dialogue opens with a typically challenging statement from the Actor who, as an advocate of orthodox, Stanislavskian performance technique, acts as a foil to the Philosopher, unwittingly enhancing the qualities of the new theatre by contrast. Thus, a correct approach to 'Wahrheit' on stage is conveyed through Brecht's well-established paradigm of allowing the Actor to make a series of misguided assertions:

DER SCHAUSPIELER: Das System des *Stanislawski* sucht für die Bühne die Wahrheit über die Wirklichkeit zu gewinnen.

DER PHILOSOPH: So hörte ich. Was ich sah an Nachbildungen, hat mich enttäuscht.

DER SCHAUSPIELER: Schlechte Nachbildungen vielleicht.

DER PHILOSOPH: Urteilt selbst! Ich hatte den Eindruck, es handelte sich eigentlich darum, Vorspiegelungen einen Höchstgrad von Wahrheit zu verleihen. (GBA 22.2, p. 827)

Yet Brecht is nevertheless clear that the process of ‘Einfühlung’ cannot be eliminated from the theatre – it cannot be denied, he states, “daß das Phänomen der Einfühlung tatsächlich im Kunsterlebnis schlechthin vorkommt” (GBA 22.2, p. 785). Accordingly, a further untitled fragment from *Der Messingkauf* sets out to theorise a place for ‘Einfühlung’ within the Epic Theatre. The note [B161], which takes the form of a discussion principally between the Actor and Philosopher, contrasts the Stanislavskian actor’s total transformation into the character during a performance with the Brechtian performer’s identification with the role as a *preparatory* characterisation strategy to be applied during rehearsals. In response to the Actor’s, purposely leading, question as to whether he can be expected to imitate a character “in die ich mich nicht im Geiste hineinversetzt habe”, the Philosopher outlines a permissible, yet *transitory*, process of identification which is to be utilized by the actor during their preliminary work on a role. Proceeding from the text, the actor imagines the character he is to imitate:

DER PHILOSOPH: Ihr geht von dem aus, was der Text, den ihr zu sprechen habt, die Handlungen und Reaktionen, die euch vorgeschrieben sind, die Situationen, in denen eure Figur sich entwickeln soll, euch in die Hand gibt. (GBA 22.2, p. 822)

The Philosopher goes on to explain how the actor will have to repeatedly engage in a process of identification with the character and that this represents just *one* of a number of methods of observation that he will apply during his groundwork on a role. Underlining the temporary nature of this empathic strategy, the Philosopher

states that, having felt himself into the role, the actor must return to a standpoint *outside* of the character's 'given circumstances'. The Philosopher uses the more *impersonal* 'Sichhinein/hinausversetzen' to describe this practice, indicating a deliberate attempt to avoid the overt emotionalism suggested by the Stanislavskian process of 'Sicheinfühlen':

DER PHILOSOPH: Ihr werdet wohl immer wieder euch in die Person, die ihr darstellen sollt, in ihre Lage, in ihre Körperlichkeit, in ihre Denkweise im Geist hineinversetzen müssen. Das ist eine der Operationen des Aufbaus der Figur. Es fördert durchaus unsere Zwecke, nur ist nötig, daß ihr es versteht, euch dann wieder hinauszusetzen. (*GBA 22.2*, p. 822)

As a further *Messingkauf* fragment explains, in preserving a distance from the character, the actor ensures that the role is effectively 'historisiert'. The actor presents the character from a privileged position which "weiter vorn in der Entwicklung liegt":

DER PHILOSOPH: Der Hauptgrund dafür, daß der Schauspieler einen deutlichen Abstand von der Figur haben muß, die er darstellt, ist folgender: um dem Zuschauer den Schlüssel zu ihrer Behandlung, oder Personen, die ihr gleichen oder deren Situation der ihrigen gleicht, den Schlüssel zu ihrem Problem auszuhändigen, muß er auf einem Punkt stehen, der nicht nur außerhalb der Sphäre der Figur, sondern auch weiter vorn in der Entwicklung liegt. (*GBA 22.2*, p. 819)

In answer to the Actor's subsequent question as to whether "das Sichhineinversetzen in die Person [...] also nur bei den Proben vor sich gehen [soll] und nicht auch beim Spielen", the Philosopher points to the difference between the practical technique of 'Sichhineinversetzen' and the Stanislavskian process of 'Sicheinfühlen' with regard to the ultimate effect of each upon the spectator (*GBA 22.2*, p. 823). As John J. White points out, 'Sichhineinversetzen' implies "a deliberate stage in the imaginative process of building up a part" which,

applied solely within the parameters of the rehearsal, is automatically followed by a reversal of the process. However, the Stanislavskian actor's 'Sicheinfühlen' is conveyed *in his performance* and is, in contrast, "uncontrolled and hence [...] dangerous in that it leads to the "Illusion" in the audience that they are watching events in real life".¹⁵⁷

The Philosopher relates an example of ineffectual 'Einführung' whereby a group of actors, tired after a great number of rehearsals, had begun to move mechanically, paying little regard to the authenticity of their playing:

DER PHILOSOPH: [...] alle waren müde, man wollte nur noch einmal den Text und die Stellungen memorieren, bewegte sich mechanisch, sprach halblaut – ich über den Effekt befriedigt war, aber nicht zuverlässig feststellen konnte, ob bei den Schauspielern Einführung stattfand oder nicht. (GBA 22.2, p. 823)

The Philosopher's statement seems surprising, coming, as it does, on the back of his proposals concerning the application of empathy in the Epic Theatre. Yet the extract compares interestingly with 'Verhinderung der Einführung'. Reaffirming Brecht's suggestion that the Epic Theatre might learn from an analysis of unsuccessful attempts at identification and the arousal of 'Einführung', the Philosopher's comments suggest that, whilst the technique is clearly indebted to Stanislavski, this was as far as Brecht was prepared to go:

Um uns einige Ratschläge zu holen, wie wir, wenn wir wollen, die Einführung des Zuschauers verhindern können, wollen wir die Beschreibung »schlechten« Spiels studieren, die ein Verfechter der Stanislawski-Methode gibt, die eine Einführung des Zuschauers anstrebt. Schlecht (poor) ist bei ihm alles, was die Einführung stört, also mag für uns gut sein. (GBA 22.1, p. 282)

¹⁵⁷ John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, p. 298.

Indeed, Brecht does not discuss flawed attempts at creating illusion – on the contrary, only those techniques which are successful in achieving a semblance of reality are held up for criticism as being ‘poor’ from the point of view of their intended purpose. In a further fragment [B115] the Philosopher derides an example of a supposedly first-rate Stanislavskian performance technique. Citing the well-known “Exerzitien für Schauspieler, welche dem Schauspieler ein natürliches Spiel beibringen sollen” familiar from Brecht’s critical Stanislavski commentaries from the end of the 1930s, the Philosopher deliberately impels the Actor to defend the absurdity of a preparatory performance approach which is specifically designed to deceive:

DER PHILOSOPH: Der Schauspieler soll eine Mütze auf den Boden legen und sich so verhalten, als sei sie eine Ratte. Er soll so die Kunst des *Glaubenmachens* erlernen.

DER SCHAUSPIELER: Eine sehr gute Übung! Wenn wir die Kunst des *Glaubenmachens* nicht beherrschten, wie sollten wir da mit ein paar Leinwandfetzen oder gar nur einer beschrifteten Tafel den Zuschauer glauben machen, er sehe jetzt das Schlachtfeld von Aktium? (GBA 22.2, p. 776)¹⁵⁸

A Finnish journal entry dated 11 January 1941, evidently formulated in conjunction with *Der Messingkauf*, makes some further pertinent comments concerning the role of ‘Einfühlung’, (or rather ‘Sichhineinversetzen’) as a “Maßnahme der *Probe*”, whilst at the same time reinforcing the distinction between the Epic actor’s use of identification and its role within Stanislavskian performance methodology. First the actor is required to feel himself into a *situation* before then going on to identify with the *character*:

¹⁵⁸ The Actor’s allusion to Epic techniques raises the question whether he is simply the Stanislavskian actor that other exchanges have led us to believe.

Voraus geht das *Einrichten* der Rolle [...]. Dann kommt, im Grund sprungweise, die Kreierung der Figur (wobei er seine Erfahrungen hinzuzieht, bestimmte Menschen kopiert, Züge verschiedener Menschen kombiniert usw.). Schon das Einrichten der Rollen kann einen Abschluß dadurch erfahren, daß der Schauspieler sich selber einfühlt, zunächst in die Situationen (wie er selber in solcher Lage sich verhielte). Beim Kreieren der Figur kann er wieder eine Einfühlung vornehmen, nunmehr in die Person, die er darstellen, kopieren will. (GBA 26, p. 454)

Yet, whilst the process is clearly indebted to Stanislavskian acting techniques, significantly, the implementation of ‘Einfühlung’ within the Epic Theatre “still represents a means to a radically different performance goal”.¹⁵⁹ Thus, Brecht’s description of the actor’s use of empathy at rehearsal is followed by a crucial statement which highlights the difference between the function of ‘Einfühlung’ in the Epic Theatre and its role within the context of a Stanislavskian performance. For the Stanislavskian actor:

ist eigene Einfühlung und Verleitung des Zuschauers zur Einfühlung (suggestive Einfühlung) identisch. Er kann sich schwer das eine ohne das andere vorstellen und das eine schwer ohne das andere praktizieren. (GBA 26, p. 454)

In contrast, it is vital, Brecht states, that for the purposes of his theatre, “die jeweilige Einfühlung ohne Suggestion stattfindet, d.h. es soll nicht auch ein Zuschauer zur Einfühlung veranlaßt werden” (GBA 26, p. 454).

Brecht’s statements on the function of ‘Einfühlung’ as a preparatory performance strategy have very significant implications for his subsequent theoretical formulations concerning the actor’s identification with a role in the ‘Stanislavski-Studien’. Yet it has generally been assumed that his proposals concerning the application of ‘Einfühlung’ at rehearsal outlined in ‘Stanislavski-

¹⁵⁹ John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht’s Dramatic Theory*, p. 296.

Studien [3]' were formulated as a quick-fix compromise in the immediate run-up to the 1953 Stanislavski conference, and commentators such as Knopf, Schöttker and Stuber have uniformly overlooked the significance of the piece in their individual attempts to demonstrate the tactical agenda of the 'Stanislawski-Studien' as a whole. However, Brecht's handling of the process in both *Der Messingkauf* and the Finnish journal entry of 1941 calls for a more nuanced reading of 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]', indicating that he was theorising a place for 'Einfühlung' at the rehearsal stage more than a decade before the 'Stanislawski-Studien'. The following chapter will examine Brecht's treatment of 'Einfühlung' within the context of the 'Stanislawski-Studien' and the extent to which 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]' can be seen to follow on from his early discussion of identification as both a deliberate and legitimate performance technique.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 3

BRECHT'S STANISLAVSKI RECEPTION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GDR'S PRO-SOVIET *KULTURPOLITIK*

The anti-Formalism campaign and endorsement of the System

Returning to Berlin in 1949, Brecht found that many of his old intellectual opponents had established themselves in prominent positions as policy makers within the cultural echelons of the SED. Newly appointed to the 'Staatliche Spielplankommission', responsible for overseeing the theatre repertory, and editor of the journal *Theater der Zeit*,¹ Fritz Erpenbeck would play a central role in the campaign against formalism and the endorsement of Stanislavski's System within the GDR. Continuously backing the Socialist Realist establishment in its opposition to Brecht's perceived decadent style of theatre, Erpenbeck was one of Brecht's most formidable opponents in the young republic. Maxim Vallentin had

¹ The first issue of the theatre journal *Theater der Zeit* appeared in 1946. As mouthpiece of the cultural-political line, in the years that followed the journal would play a significant role in both the orchestration of the campaign against formalism and the dissemination of Stanislavski's methodology in the GDR. Articles on Stanislavski's System appeared on a regular basis in *Theater der Zeit* during the Stanislavski wave of 1951-1953. By contrast, none of Brecht's theoretical writings was ever published in the journal.

set up the 'Deutsches Theater-Institut' in Weimar in 1947 together with Ottofritz Gaillard and Otto Lang, instructing actors in Stanislavski's early techniques.²

Brecht was clearly aware of the importance of establishing "eine starke Gruppe" in Berlin. A letter addressed to Ruth Berlau written in November 1947 reveals how Anna Seghers had advised him of the importance of establishing a solid network of like-minded practitioners in Berlin – "Allein, oder fast allein", he wrote with reference to his communication with Seghers, "kann man nicht existieren" (*GBA* 29, p. 427). Brecht had been in the city barely a few months and yet such were his fears of artistic isolation that, in a letter to Berthold Viertel composed sometime during March or April 1949, he complained:

Noch ist viel im Fluß, aber viel beginnt sich schon zu verhärten. Produktionsstätten werden zu Posten und Positionen. Risse vertiefen sich, Skepsis wird Verdacht, Vorurteile zementieren sich ein, kleine Leute beziehen große Stellungen und formieren zähe Cliques usw. (*GBA* 29, pp. 509-10)

² An early 'Referat' entitled 'Einleitende Bemerkungen zur Ausarbeitung von Richtlinien (Theater)', presented by Vallentin at a 'Sitzung mit Schriftstellern über Kunstfragen im neuen Deutschland' which took place at the Moscow Lux Hotel on 25 September 1944, cited the significance of the translation of "theatergeschichtlichen und theater-theoretischen, methodischen Arbeiten (Stanislawskij)". See Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen: Studien zum DDR-Theater* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1998), pp. 257-61 (p. 260). In 1952 Maxim Vallentin founded the Maxim-Gorki-Theater in Berlin, where he continued his work instructing actors in the principles of Stanislavski's system. In the summer of 1953 the Deutsches Theater-Institut moved to Leipzig and was amalgamated with the Leipziger Schauspielschule. Later that year the Theaterhochschule Leipzig was founded as a result of the merger. Otto Lang was director of the acting school until 1958.

Recalling his abortive effort to establish the *Diderot-Gesellschaft* during the latter half of the 1930s, Brecht's stressed the importance of establishing a creative 'Produktionsgruppe' in Berlin:

Glauben Sie mir, es ist wirklich wichtig, eine Produktionsgruppe zu bilden [...]. Das Feld dort muß auch gehalten und das heißt erobert werden, denn wenn es verlorenght, werden wir überall anders einfach zertreten werden. Und die Zeit läuft ab. (GBA 29, p. 510)

Brecht's letter to Viertel communicates an appropriate sense of urgency. Whilst the course of artistic cultural policy had not yet been officially charted and the subsequent impact of the Stanislavskians' authority was yet to be fully felt, the tone of Brecht's correspondence nonetheless suggests his alarm at the alacrity with which certain aesthetic styles were already being prescribed. A further letter addressed to Erwin Piscator and written in March 1949 echoes this sentiment, urging him to come to Berlin as soon as possible to assess "das Arbeitsfeld":

Der Zeitpunkt ist gut, es sollte nicht viel später sein, jetzt ist alles noch im Fluß und seine Richtung wird bestimmt werden durch die vorhandenen Potenzen. Du würdest mit größter Wärme empfangen und man würde durchaus verstehen, wenn Du zunächst etwas unverbindlich wärest und den Porzellanladen mit einiger Vorsicht beträttest. Ich selber sprach nicht öffentlich, nirgend [*sic*], äußerte mich überhaupt nicht öffentlich, machte nur meine Arbeit. (GBA 29, p. 505)

An article printed in *Theater der Zeit* the same year gives some indication of the extent of Stanislavski's influence on the East German cultural climate at the end of the 1940s, simultaneously illustrating the orientation towards Soviet cultural policy:³

³ Further documentation concerning Soviet cultural policy in the GDR is given in: Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR 1945-1990* (Cologne: Edition Deutschland Archiv, 1994) and Peter Davies, *Divided Loyalties: East German Writers and the Politics of German*

Seit 1945 geistert ein Zauberwort durch die deutschen Theaterschulen, und das heißt Stanislawski [...]. Es gibt fast keine Schauspielschule mehr ohne ‚Stanislawski-Übungen‘.⁴

Two years later the campaign against formalism was officially announced. Whilst the steady influence of Soviet artistic policy had been evident since the late 1940s, the anti-formalism campaign virtually signalled the end of independent artistic thinking within the GDR. Following Soviet cultural policy, artists were required to renounce all forms of perceived formalist approach in favour of Socialist Realism. For East German theatre practitioners this meant abiding by the example set by Stanislavski. Brought into sharp focus at the ‘5. Tagung des ZK der SED’ held from 15 to 17 March 1951, the campaign against formalism in art and literature was declared synonymous with the notion of a national cultural identity for the young socialist state:

Die Aufgabe lautet, eine neue demokratische Kultur zu schaffen, die in Wissenschaft und Kunst die neuen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zum Ausdruck bringt, eine Kultur zu schaffen, die dem deutschen Volke helfen wird, seine Lebensfragen zu lösen und den breitesten Schichten des Volkes im Kampfe um die Lösung dieser Aufgaben begeisterte, mutige und optimistische Zuversicht gibt.⁵

Indeed, culture and the arts were assigned a major ideological role in the GDR representing the alternative battlefield upon which such issues of national

Division, 1945-1953 (MHRA Texts and Dissertations, 49; Bithell Series of Dissertations, 24) (London: MHRA, 2000).

⁴ Ottofritz Gaillard, ‘Stanislawski-Maskerade’, *Theater der Zeit*, (hereafter abbreviated to *TZ*), 4, no. 2, (1949), 6-7 (7).

⁵ The Protocol to the ‘5. Tagung des ZK der SED, 15.-17. März, 1951’ is reprinted in Joachim Lucchesi, (ed.), *Das Verhör in der Oper: die Debatte um die Aufführung “Das Verhör des Lukullus” von Bertolt Becht und Paul Dessau* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1993), pp. 127-77 (p. 129).

legitimation would be fought. Any deviation from the official line was accordingly considered a direct attack on the state itself. Like that of the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' two years later, the tone of the '5. Tagung des ZK der SED' was thus predominantly confrontational:

Der Kampf gegen die Kulturbarbarei [...] richtet sich im Grunde gegen Kosmopolitismus, gegen Formalismus, gegen Schund, gegen Kitsch, gegen alle diese wirkliche Kulturbarbarei [...]. In diesem Kampfe darf es gerade in Interesse der Erhaltung des Friedens keine Kompromisse, keine Toleranz geben.⁶

For a regime still struggling to establish its own cultural identity, Brecht's independent theatrical approach represented a challenge to the state's designs on controlled artistic homogeneity. At odds with official aesthetic policy on account of both his 1951 production of *Die Mutter* and his collaboration with Paul Dessau on *Das Verhör des Lukullus* the same year (the latter of which was removed from the repertory by the Party following its premiere on 17 March 1951), Brecht was accused of creating formalist work. Both productions were singled out for harsh criticism at the plenary meeting and deemed inconsistent with the role of art in defining a new democratic culture. Hans Lauter, a leading Party functionary, dismissed *Lukullus* as contrary to the aim of socialist construction,⁷ whilst Fred Olßner's criticism of *Die Mutter* clearly demonstrated the Soviet orientation in cultural policy:

⁶ '5. Tagung des ZK der SED, 15.-17. März, 1951', pp. 172-73.

⁷ "Kommt in einer solchen Musik zum Ausdruck, daß der Inhalt unserer demokratischen Aufbauarbeit darin seine Gestalt findet? Nein! Eine solche Musik und ein solches Stück können nicht dazu beitragen, daß wir, daß das deutsche Volk sich entwickelt in Richtung der Lösung seiner Lebensfrage." '5. Tagung des ZK der SED, 15.-17. März, 1951', p. 158.

ich frage, ist das wirklich Realismus? Sind hier typische Gestalten in typischer Umgebung dargestellt? [...] Entschuldigt, ich bin der Auffassung, das ist kein Theater; das ist irgendwie eine Kreuzung oder Synthese von Meyerhold und Proletkult.⁸

Helene Weigel was present at the 'Tagung'. Her function as diplomatic representative of the Berliner Ensemble at the plenary meeting is comparable to her role at the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' two years later. Here, as at the later conference, her comments were characterised by a deliberate air of compromise:

Liebe Genossen! Ich möchte euch als erstes gleich ein Wort zur Beruhigung sagen. Gerade weil ich beim Lukullus nicht unvoreingenommen bin, wollte ich darüber gar nicht sprechen. Ich hätte mich zu sehr als Partei gefühlt, um das Wort zu ergreifen. Erlaubt mir – ich bin keine Rednerin –, nur kurze Sätze zu den einzelnen Punkten zu sagen, zu denen ich mir kleine Notizen gemacht habe.⁹

Indeed, according to one critic, Weigel's self-effacing approach at the plenary was reminiscent of the:

alte Verkehrungsspiel der Narren und Harlekine [...]. Solche virtuosen und ambivalenten Balanceakte [...] erwiesen sich zudem als eine kongeniale Strategie in der unsicheren Zeit des Aufbaus des BEs und inmitten der kulturpolitischen Richtungswechsel am Anfang der fünfziger Jahre in der DDR.¹⁰

The authorised Stanislavski wave took place between 1951-1953, in conjunction with the campaign against formalism. Reflecting Soviet cultural policy, the Stanislavski approach was declared the official vehicle of theatrical Socialist Realism and the only appropriate practice for theatres in the GDR. The

⁸ '5. Tagung des ZK der SED, 15.-17. März, 1951', p. 173.

⁹ Petra Stuber, 'Helene Weigel und ihre Rolle als Intendantin zwischen 1949 und 1954', in Judith Wilke (ed.), *Helene Weigel 100. The Brecht Yearbook 25* (Waterloo, Canada: The International Brecht Society, 2000), pp. 253-275 (p. 265).

¹⁰ Petra Stuber, 'Helene Weigel und ihre Rolle als Intendantin zwischen 1949 und 1954', pp. 265-66.

implementation of Stanislavski's methods was central to the notion of national legitimation and the approach was officially assigned a principal role in adapting the theatre to the needs of the state. 'Stanislawski-Zirkel' were rigorously endorsed, their aim being to ensure the study and practical application of Stanislavski's systematic approach within the theatre. In an article entitled "'Wir haben einen Stanislawski-Zirkel...!'" printed in *Theater der Zeit*, Fritz Erpenbeck emphasised the role of such groups in the effective implementation of Stanislavski's methods and the collective campaign against formalism on the stage:

[Es] ist [...] heute unverantwortlich, wenn sich nicht zumindest jeder Regisseur gewissenhaft mit der Methode Stanislawskis auseinandersetzt [...]. Sehe ich nun aber auf der Bühne eines Theaters, daß formalistisch gebastelt oder verkrampft psychologisiert oder auch [...] routiniert geschwindelt wird, dann ist damit offenbart, daß man die Methode Stanislawskis – sofern man behauptet, nach ihr zu arbeiten – nicht begriffen und deshalb zum Popanz gemacht hat. Das aber geschieht bei uns leider noch häufig genug und nicht nur an kleinen und mittleren Bühnen.¹¹

The 'Stanislawski-Zirkel', he claimed, 'müssen nunmehr entschieden aufhören, Alchimistenklubs oder talmiwissenschaftliche Debattierkränzchen zu sein'.¹² Yet, whilst the implementation of the Soviet System was firmly endorsed, artistic policy makers were patently at pains to dispel the notion that the approach represented a doctrinaire code of belief, as an article by Otto Lang published in *Theater der Zeit* in November 1951 illustrates:

Die Methode Stanislawskis ist kein Dogma, sondern eine Anleitung zum schöpferischen Handeln auf der Bühne [...]. Die Stanislawski-Methode ist [...] auch

¹¹ Fritz Erpenbeck, "'Wir haben einen Stanislawski-Zirkel'", *TZ*, 7, no. 12 (1952), 1-5 (2 and 3). Articles endorsing the Soviet technique were published in the journal on a regular basis between 1951 and 1953.

¹² Fritz Erpenbeck, "'Wir haben einen Stanislawski-Zirkel'", 5.

kein Geheimverfahren, das nur wenigen zugänglich ist, sondern ein System, das jedem talentierten und fortschrittlichen Bühnenkünstler zur Verfügung steht.¹³

Rejecting the charge that the implementation of Stanislavski's System was synonymous with a 'levelling off' of artistic expression, a further article by Fritz Erpenbeck, printed in the following issue of the journal, made an analogous point:

Wenn es irgendwo in der Welt des Theaters keine Gleichförmigkeit, keine Nivellierung des Stils gibt, dann in der Sowjetunion. Und doch hören wir immer wieder, alle oder fast alle Theater der Sowjetunion arbeiten nach dem System Stanislawski. Ist das nicht ein Widerspruch? Natürlich nicht. Es besagt nämlich zunächst nichts anderes, als daß das "System Stanislawski" keine Fixierung eines Stils und schon gar nicht eines national bedingten Stils ist. Wenn wir das erkannt haben, [...] dann ist damit eines der größten Mißverständnisse aus dem Wege geräumt, das bisher viele deutsche Künstler hinderte, sich ernsthaft mit Stanislawski und seinem Werk zu beschäftigen: die Angst vor einem Schema, die Angst vor künstlerischer Monotonie [...]. Das Wort "System" hat für die meisten deutschen Künstler einen Beigeschmack von "Rezeptsammlung".¹⁴

Despite the intention to convince otherwise, such comments indicate that many artists were uncomfortable in the new artistic climate. Dismissing the notion that Stanislavski's System represented a prescribed artistic policy aimed at curbing creative initiative, an article published in *Theater der Zeit* the following year only further underlined the continuing unease:

Das Stanislawski-System [ist] kein Dogma [...] und [...] seine Anhänger [sind] keine Buchstabengelehrten und Talmudisten [...]. Nichts ist dem Stanislawski-System feindlicher als Dogmatismus, Schematismus und Schablone.¹⁵

¹³ Otto Lang, 'Die Bedeutung des Stanislawski-Systems', *TZ*, 6, no. 19 (1951), 24-28 (24).

¹⁴ Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Von unsern Freunden lernen ("Von der Sowjetunion lernen heißt siegen lernen!")', *TZ*, 6, no. 20 (1951), 3-5 (3).

¹⁵ Gustav Just, 'Das sowjetische Theater – unser Vorbild im Kampf um die sozialistische Theaterkunst', *TZ*, 7, no. 21 (1952), 1-7 (5).

Brecht's own apprehension regarding the rigid enforcement of the cultural line is palpable in the seemingly conciliatory note 'Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislawskis gelernt werden kann', printed in *Theaterarbeit* in 1952. The list of nine aspects put forward by Brecht as suggested points of contact between his and Stanislavski's practice reads as follows:

1. Der Sinn für das Dichterische eines Stücks
2. Das Verantwortungsgefühl der Gesellschaft gegenüber
3. Das Ensemblespiel der Stars
4. Wichtigkeit der großen Linie und des Details
5. Die Verpflichtung zur Wahrheit
6. Der Einklang von Natürlichkeit und Stil
7. Darstellung der Wirklichkeit als voll von Widersprüchen
8. Die Wichtigkeit des Menschen
9. Die Bedeutung der Weiterentwicklung der Kunst (GBA 23, pp. 167-68)

Stressing what she regards as the text's abundant "evidence of proximity between Brecht and Stanislavski", Margaret Eddershaw has argued that the list "gives weight to the argument that in many aspects of their practice [...] they were not at opposite ends of a theatrical gamut".¹⁶ Yet despite Brecht's attempt to make the list appear a considered account of the apparent points of contact between his and Stanislavski's practice, the aspects are, on the contrary, both abstract and superficial. Noticeably lacking any reference to Stanislavski's system of acting techniques, none of the features listed is supported by specific examples from Stanislavski's methodology, or underlined by illustrations taken from the Soviet practitioner's productions, as one would expect. In fact, despite the titular inference that the list constitutes the most significant features that can be learnt from Stanislavski "*unter anderem*", all of the most prominent characteristics of

¹⁶ Margaret Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht: Forty Years of British Performances*, p. 24.

the Soviet approach are conspicuously absent. Rather, as John Willett suggests, qualities such as the importance of detail, the feeling for a play's poetry and the effectiveness of ensemble playing, do not really constitute "the salient features of Stanislavsky, but rather the characteristics which he and Brecht had in common."¹⁷ As such, the list reads less like a genuine appraisal of Stanislavski's methods than a tactical gesture of short-term expediency aimed at satisfying artistic requirements.¹⁸ Significantly, none of the later features of Stanislavski's methodology – most notably the 'method of physical action' and the actor's perspective – make the list, indicating that the insights which inform the 'Stanislawski-Studien' two years later, were still largely unfamiliar to Brecht in 1951. Indeed, the absence of the very features of Stanislavskian methodology which were most relevant to his Epic Theatre suggests that Brecht could not have been very aware of their usefulness, as to *deliberately* overlook them in a text so palpably designed to satisfy the official aesthetic line, would surely mean undermining his own position. The positioning of 'Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislawskis gelernt werden kann', tucked away at the *end* of *Theaterarbeit*, very much reinforces the idea that the note represented a last minute compromise – a token nod in the direction of the official aesthetic line. If one accepts Schöttker's suggestion that *Theaterarbeit* was intended as a 'Gegenpol zum Deutschen Stanislawski-Buch',¹⁹ it seems similarly non-coincidental that the text appeared in the publication directly before 'Aus einem

¹⁷ John Willett, (ed. and trans.), *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 238.

¹⁸ Werner Hecht calls the piece "ein taktisch bemerkenswertes Zugeständnis gegenüber früher geäußerten Meinungen", 'Grund der Empörung über 'eine ganz unerträgliche Behandlung'', 78.

¹⁹ Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven*, p. 240.

Brief an einen Schauspieler' which, with its direct rejection of the actor's total synthesis with the character on stage, ultimately has the effect of relativising the ostensibly conciliatory tone of 'Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislawskis gelernt werden kann', making it appear a strictly *provisional* concession to the official line. Indeed, evoking the very 'Weiterentwicklung der Kunst', which constitutes point nine of 'Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislawskis gelernt werden kann', 'Aus einem Brief an einen Schauspieler' describes an approach to characterisation which transcends Stanislavskian performance techniques. The actor, Brecht states:

solle sich nicht völlig in die Stückfigur verwandeln, sondern sozusagen neben ihr stehenbleiben, als Kritiker oder Lober [...]. Es gibt [...] ein völliges Aufgehen des Schauspielers in seiner Figur, das zur Folge hat, daß er sie so selbstverständlich, so gar nicht anders zu denken erscheinen läßt, daß der Zuschauer sie einfach hinzunehmen hat, wie sie eben ist, und es entsteht ein ganz unfruchtbares ›alles verstehen ist alles verzeihen‹, wie wir es besonders stark beim Naturalismus hatten. (GBA 23, pp. 172-73)

Yet, in view of the political pressure he was under, it is hardly surprising that Brecht would attempt such an obviously conciliatory gesture as that which 'Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislawskis gelernt werden kann' ostensibly seeks to convey. Manfred Wekwerth, who worked alongside Brecht as a director's assistant at the Berliner Ensemble from 1951, describes how the almost fanatical endorsement of Stanislavski's methods in the GDR increased Brecht's sense of artistic isolation:

diesen Moskauern war es von vornherein gelungen, großen Einfluss zu gewinnen [...]. Sie nannten sich Stanislawski-Leute: Damals war in der Sowjetunion Stanislawski nicht nur ein Theaterbekenntnis, sondern ein Glaube, Staatsreligion

[...], zu dieser Zeit, als Brecht ankam, war es eine harte Konfrontation zwischen der Stanislawski-Linie und Brecht.²⁰

The forcefulness of the cultural campaign is reflected in Brecht's notes where he complains of the "drohende[n] Sätze" (*GBA* 23, p. 134) of the critics and the 'dictatorial' suppression of independent artistic output (*GBA* 23, p. 138). His notes also allude to the tendency to characterise all so-called creative non-conformity as a symptom of social decadence, or, worse still, as a 'disease':

Anstelle des politischen Vokabulars tritt das medizinische: Anstatt nachzuweisen, bei dem und dem Kunstwerk handle es sich um etwas gesellschaftlich Unnützes oder Schädliches, behauptet man, es handle sich um eine Krankheit. Wenn der Arzt nicht gerufen wird, gesunde Kunstwerke herzustellen, wird die Polizei gerufen, ein Verbrechen am Volk zu ahnden. (*GBA* 23, pp. 141-42)

Illustrating such inclination towards medical-biological terminology, an article written by Fritz Erpenbeck in 1951 simultaneously underlines the extent to which Stanislavski's System represented a fundamental element of the cultural campaign against formalist 'Kulturbarbarei' on the East German stage:

"Es hat auch vor Stanislawski ausgezeichnete Schauspieler gegeben!" Das ist ein oft gehörter Einwand. Nun, es hat auch vor der Entdeckung der Bazillen oder des Blutkreislaufs zahlreiche gute, ja geniale Ärzte gegeben [...]. Es gab eben doch weit mehr schlechte als gute oder gar geniale Ärzte. Das beweist die Sterblichkeitsstatistik. [...] Nun gibt es bei uns nicht auch weit mehr schlechte als gute Schauspieler? [...] Aber wenn sie [...] unsere Bühnenschaffenden anregen, sich mit dem Werk Stanislawskis ernsthafter als bisher zu befassen, halbverdaute Schlagworte beiseite zu lassen und statt dessen zu lernen, so sind wir schon ein gutes Stück weiter.²¹

²⁰ Olga Fedianina, 'Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Wekwerth', in Judith Wilke (ed.), *Helene Weigel 100. The Brecht Yearbook* 25, 285-99 (286).

²¹ Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Von unsern Freunden lernen ("Von der Sowjetunion lernen heißt siegen lernen!")', 4-5.

In line with the official call for the theatre to follow the Stanislavskian model, numerous books on the Soviet director by ex-students and exponents of his teachings were published in the GDR. These included Ottofritz Gaillard's *Das Deutsche Stanislawski-Buch: Lehrbuch der Schauspielkunst nach dem Stanislawski-System* which appeared in 1947 and *Vom Stegreif zum Stück: Ein Ensemble-Buch auf der Grundlage des Stanislawski-Systems*, written by Maxim Vallentin and published in 1949. Both authors were prominent practitioners of Stanislavski's System and in 1947 had established the 'Deutsches Theater-Institut' in Weimar alongside Otto Lang. Several translations of books written by former students of Stanislavski were also published in association with the 'Deutsches Theater-Institut' during the first half of the 1950s: *Studioarbeit mit Stanislawski* by Konkordia Antarowa, Wassili Ossipowitsch Toporkow's *K. S. Stanislawski bei der Probe* and a volume of material entitled *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle: Fünf Aufsätze über Stanislawskis »Methode der physischen Handlungen«* (which Hecht, significantly, omits from his account of the literature available on Stanislavski's System in the GDR)²² all appeared in 1952, whilst *Das Stanislawski-System und das Sowjet-Theater* by Nikolai Abalkin was published

²² Werner Hecht, 'Grund der Empörung über eine 'ganz unerträgliche Behandlung'', 78-79. *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle* contains the following five essays: K. S. Stanislawski, 'Von den physischen Handlungen' (pp. 9-20), W. Prokofjew, 'Die physischen Handlungen und die Arbeit an der Rolle' (pp. 21-93), W. Toporkow, 'Handlung, Wort, Überaufgabe' (pp. 94-119), B. Sachawa, 'Die Natur der Schauspielkunst' (pp. 120-45), and G. Gurjew, 'Gegen die Vulgarisierung: Der Methode der physischen Handlungen' (pp. 146-83). The essays were originally published in the Soviet journal *Teatr* during the period October 1950 – January 1951.

the following year.²³ In 1954 *Stanislawskis Weg zur Oper* by Grigorii Kristi was published in the GDR (again omitted by Hecht). Coinciding with the Stanislavski wave, the ‘Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten’ and the ‘Deutsches Theater-Institut’ issued a series of pamphlets on Stanislavski’s methods in 1952 under the heading *Dramaturgie und Schauspielkunst: Methodische Beiträge*.

Hecht’s reference to the availability of Stanislavski-related literature in the GDR does not, however, include any indication of which of these books Brecht actually *owned*. Aside from Stanislavski’s own book *Mein Leben in der Kunst*, Brecht’s library contains a significant portion of the secondary literature available on the Soviet practitioner’s work, including copies of *Das Deutsche Stanislawski-Buch*, *Vom Stegreif zum Stück*, *K. S. Stanislawski bei der Probe*, *Studioarbeit mit Stanislawski* and *Stanislawskis Weg zur Oper* (it is worth noting that the publication of the latter postdates the official Stanislavski wave and the height of the political pressure on Brecht). Brecht’s journal indicates that he had first come into contact with Ottofritz Gaillard’s *Das Deutsche Stanislawski-Buch* during exile, rejecting the book on account of its ‘hausbacken moralische Ton’ (*GBA* 27, pp. 246). In a journal entry dated 15 September 1947, Brecht had criticised the book, calling the System an “elaborierter Kult mit ›Realität‹” which comprised introspective exercises aimed at auto-suggestion and totally lacking in social perspective. The tone and vocabulary of the entry are familiar from the early

²³ Konkordia Antarowa’s book was originally published in the Soviet Union in 1939, Vasily Osipovich Toporkov and Nikolai Abalkin’s books on Stanislavski both appeared in 1950 and Grigorii Kristi’s book was published in 1952.

Stanislawski commentaries which similarly criticised both the perceived emotionalism of the System and its lack of political relevance. No reference is made to any of Stanislawski's subsequent theoretical preoccupations with physical action and perspective. On the contrary, Brecht once again draws a contrast between the introspective nature of Stanislawskian methodology and his own notion that, by learning to observe correctly, the actor becomes politically aware:

Lese Das Deutsche Stanislawskibuch. [...] Sie praktizieren das jetzt in einer Weimarer Schauspielschule. [...] Bemerkenswert ist, wie die Deutschen das System der progressiven russischen Bourgeoisie der Zarenzeit so ganz und gar unberührt konservieren konnten. Unter den Exerzitien (vorgestellten Situation) habe ich bisher noch kein einziges Beispiel aus den Klassenkämpfen gefunden. [...] Nirgends sind Beobachtungen anempfohlen, es sei denn Selbstbeobachtungen. Die Außenwelt spiegelt sich ausschließlich in einem Sensorium. (GBA 27, p. 246)²⁴

With reference to Brecht's criticism of *Das Deutsche Stanislawski-Buch*, Hecht states that it is:

gewiß keine Überraschung, daß sich Brecht zehn Monate später bei seiner ersten Theaterarbeit nach der Rückkehr aus dem Exil nicht um die Empfehlungen dieses Stanislawski-Buches kümmert, das – wie es im Vorwort Maxim Valentins [*sic*] heißt – “der Durchsetzung einer naturgemäßen, d.h. vernünftigen Methode” dienen will.²⁵

Yet, whilst the presence of two copies of the book in Brecht's library containing personal dedications by Ottofritz Gaillard and Maxim Vallentin dated 1949 by no

²⁴ The journal entry recalls Brecht's letter to Gorelik written during March 1937 in which, with reference to Stanislawski's methods, he claimed “die Revolution hat überhaupt nicht stattgefunden. Diese ganze Technik war schon vorher da, in den Tagen des Väterchen Zar” (GBA 29, p. 17). The criticism extends beyond Stanislawski's techniques, implicitly questioning the regime's endorsement of an artist whose work overlooks the Revolution. See also the Dramaturg's description of the Soviet practitioner's theatre in *Der Messingkauf*: “Als Stanislawski im besten Alter stand, kam die Revolution. Sein Theater wurde mit größtem Respekt behandelt. 20 Jahre nach der Revolution konnte man auf diesem Theater wie in einem Museum noch die Lebensweise inzwischen von der Bildfläche verschwundener Gesellschaftsschichten studieren” (GBA 22.2, p. 704).

²⁵ Werner Hecht, ‘Grund der Empörung über eine ‘ganz unerträgliche Behandlung’’, 77.

means prove that Brecht had become a fully-fledged Stanislavakian, they certainly indicate that his interest in the Soviet System was (as Matthew Philpotts has similarly suggested) more than simply short-term pragmatism – predating, as it did, both the height of the formalism campaign and the Stanislavski wave by a number of years.²⁶

Significantly Brecht's library also contains four of the volumes from the series *Dramaturgie und Schauspielkunst: Methodische Beiträge* which appeared in 1952, namely – L. Frejdkina, 'Die Regie W. I. Nemirowitsch-Dantschenkos und das Stanislawski-System' (vol. 3),²⁷ Nikolai Gorchakov, 'Regieunterricht Stanislawskis auf der Probe des Stückes 'Das heiße Herz': Das perspektivische Schema der Rolle und des Schauspielers' (vol. 4), Konkordia Antarowa, 'Drei Proben mit Stanislawski' (vol. 6)²⁸ and Wassili Ossipowitsch Toporkow, 'Der Schauspieler im Ensemble' (vol. 7). Whilst Hecht refers to their availability in the GDR, speculating that Brecht "[sie] mit Sicherheit teilweise gekannt habe muß", he nonetheless fails to mention the presence of four of the volumes from the *Dramaturgie und Schauspielkunst* series in his personal library – an unfortunate omission given that the particular issues owned by Brecht are mostly concerned with the later aspects of Stanislavski's work on the System and therefore provide further evidence of Brecht's interest in these developments.²⁹

²⁶ Matthew Philpotts, "“Aus so prosaischen Dingen wie Kartoffeln, Straßen, Traktoren werden poetische Dinge!” Brecht, *Sinn und Form*, and Strittmatter's *Katzgraben*", 69.

²⁷ Brecht's library contains two copies of volume 3, one of which belonged to Helene Weigel.

²⁸ The subtitle of volume 6 describes the 'drei Proben' as: "1. Die Entdeckung von physischen Handlungen im Text. 2. Genauigkeit der Vorstellungen. 3. Die Verpflichtung des Schauspielers".

²⁹ Werner Hecht, 'Grund der Empörung über eine 'ganz unerträgliche Behandlung'', 79.

Beyond their immediate function as theatrical handbooks, the abundance of available literature on the System underlined the centrality of the aesthetic to the construction of a defining cultural identity for the young socialist state. Both the timing of the publication of these works and their prevalence indicates the extent to which Stanislavski's System was rapidly becoming a 'national bedingte[r] Stil' at odds with independent artistic expression.³⁰ Despite his comments to the contrary, Maxim Vallentin's introductory remarks in *Vom Stegreif zum Stück* nonetheless indicate that, by 1949, certain aesthetic guidelines were already being strictly prescribed by the cultural-political establishment:

Der Leser möge mir noch am Ende meiner einleitenden Bemerkungen die – leider notwendige – Feststellung gestatten, daß wir mit keiner unserer Vorstellungen und mit keiner unserer Publikationen etwa darauf Anspruch machen, den einzig gangbaren Weg beschritten zu haben, und daß wir auf keinerlei sensationelle Einmaligkeit abzielen. Im Gegenteil wünschen wir nur Anregungen zu geben zur vielseitigen Wiederentfaltung des sich erneuernden deutschen Theaterlebens [...]. Unser deutsches Theater muß entscheidend helfen, ideologische Tatsachen hervorzubringen, die die Voraussetzungen für die Konstituierung einer erneuerten deutschen Nation sind, einer Nation, die würdig ist, in der Nachbarschaft der großen Nationen zu leben.³¹

Ottofritz Gaillard's preface to the German publication of Konkordia Antarowa's *Studioarbeit mit Stanislawski*, published three years later, confirms the inviolability of Stanislavski's System as the "einzig gangbare[r] Weg" for a dramatist within the Socialist Realist aesthetic. With their cautionary words of

³⁰ Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Von unsern Freunden lernen ("Von der Sowjetunion lernen heißt siegen lernen!")', 3.

³¹ Maxim Vallentin, *Vom Stegreif zum Stück: Ein Ensemble-Buch auf der Grundlage des Stanislawski-Systems* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1949), p. 14 and p. 28

warning against ‘fatal’ artistic misdemeanours, Gaillard’s comments indicate that the approach had lost none of the inviolability conferred upon it by Soviet policy-makers and American practitioners alike:

Heute fehlt es nicht an Versuchen, zu einer Erneuerung des deutschen Theaters durch formale und architektonische Experimente zu kommen. Aber gerade hier könnten uns die Erkenntnisse Stanislawskis und die Erfahrungen des sowjetischen Theaters vor verhängnisvollen Irrtümern bewahren [...]. Auf diesem Wege zur Wahrheit [...] hilft uns Stanislawskis Werk und gibt uns die Grundlagen für unsere eigene Arbeit. Die Erneuerung des deutschen Theaters ist nur ein Teil der großen gesellschaftlichen Erneuerung des deutschen Volkes.³²

Endorsed by the establishment and committed to the study and dissemination of Stanislavski’s techniques, the ‘Deutsches Theater-Institut’ in Weimar was the foremost school of actor training in the GDR. Yet the ‘1. Deutsche Theaterkongreß’ which took place on 17-18 January 1953, shortly before the ‘Stanislawski-Konferenz’, only served to further highlight the unease shared by artists towards the Soviet System, indicating that it was still only being implemented by a small percentage of GDR practitioners. Organised by the ‘Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten’ under the heading “Das sowjetische Theater – Unser Vorbild”, the congress was a key cultural-political event, attended by some 400 participants. Otto Lang, director of the ‘Schauspielabteilung’ at the ‘Deutsches Theater-Institut’ gave the opening address entitled “Das sowjetische Theater – unser Vorbild im Kampf um den sozialistischen Realismus”. Yet the ‘Deutsches Theater-Institut’ came in for sharp

³² Ottofritz Gaillard, ‘Vorwort zur deutschen Ausgabe’, Konkordia Antarowa, *Studioarbeit mit Stanislawski* (Berlin/GDR: Bruno Henschel und Sohn, 1952), p. 16.

criticism both at the congress and in the immediate aftermath of the event. Gustav von Wangenheim attacked what he considered the artistic insularity of the institution and the 'Praxisferne' of its actor-training programme:

Man könnte sich entschließen, den Nachwuchs von allen Einflüssen und hitzigen Auseinandersetzungen innerhalb der Fachwelt fernzuhalten und nach einem sorgsam ausgewählten und streng umgrenzten System gewissermaßen wie in einem Kloster zu erziehen. Dies ist in [sic] Belvedere von Weimar versucht worden und hat sich, wie wir wissen, bei erfreulichen Teilresultaten in der Ausbildung von wissenschaftlichen Kadern, speziell für den Schauspielernachwuchs, nicht überzeugend bewährt.³³

The general implication was that Stanislavski's System was inaccessible and elitist. The effects of such alleged insularity and artistic superiority were further felt at the ensuing 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' where the general 'Oberflächlichkeit' and the "ungenügende Kenntnis von Stanislavskis Theaterarbeit"³⁴, particularly concerning the Soviet director's later practices, was palpable in many of the contributions from GDR theatre practitioners.

The 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' (1953)

The 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' took place at the 'Akademie der Künste' from 17 to 19 April 1953, three months after the '1. Deutsche Theaterkongreß'. Organised by the 'Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten' and chaired by Fritz Erpenbeck, the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' marked the peak of the Soviet director's officially orchestrated wave of popularity within the GDR. Assembling some two hundred theatre practitioners and party functionaries, the event was specifically aimed at promoting Stanislavski's systematic approach as the official vehicle of

³³ Quoted from Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 158.

³⁴ Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 163.

theatrical Socialist Realism within East Germany. Besides Erpenbeck, those present at the conference in an official capacity included Maxim Vallentin, Otto Lang and Ottofritz Gaillard from the Deutsches Theater-Institut,³⁵ Hans Rodenberg, director of DEFA, the state film company; and Wolfgang Langhoff, head of the Deutsches Theater who delivered the ‘Hauptreferat’.³⁶ The conference had been convened under the banner: »Wie können wir uns die Methode Stanislawskis aneignen?« ‘Aneignen’ is an important term here and implies the very real notion that the appropriation of Stanislavski’s methods and compliance with the dominant discourse was considered compulsory by the Establishment. Still very much feeling its way through uncharted territory, the official endorsement of Stanislavski’s approach was once more declared synonymous with the national aspirations of the GDR and the campaign to establish a durable cultural identity for the state:

In der gegenwärtigen Epoche, da wir in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik den Sozialismus aufbauen, gibt es für die Bühnenkünstler nur eine Methode der Arbeit, nämlich die Methode des sozialistischen Realismus [...]. Wenn es uns gelingt, in weitere Kreise der Bühnenkünstler das System Stanislawskis

³⁵ Stuber states that Gaillard was originally meant to open the ‘Stanislawski-Konferenz’, but in the wake of the criticism levelled at the Deutsches Theater-Institut at the ‘1. Deutsche Theaterkongreß’ he withdrew, recommending that Maxim Vallentin take his place. Having recently established the Maxim Gorki-Theater in Berlin, Vallentin could not be accused of being non praxis-oriented in his work. However, Gaillard’s recommendation was not put into effect – instead Erpenbeck took over the ‘Gesprächsleitung’ and Langhoff was chosen to deliver the ‘Hauptreferat’. Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 159.

³⁶ Others present at the conference in an official capacity included: Armin-Gerd Kuckhoff and Gertrud Glaser (Deutsches Theater-Institut, Weimar), Werner Segtrop (Deutsches Theater), Erwin Reiche and Heinz Fischer (DEFA), Fritz Dietz (Intendant, Meiningen), the actor Edwin Marian (Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin), Achim Hübner (Maxim Gorki-Theater, Berlin), Hansjoachim Beygang (Landestheater Neustrelitz), Ferdinand May (Chefdramaturg, Leipzig) and the writer Harald Hauser.

hineinzutragen und gleichzeitig alle alten überlebten Ansichten zu überwinden, werden wir einen wichtigen Schritt auf dem Wege zur Durchsetzung der Methode des sozialistischen Realismus auf der Bühne getan haben.³⁷

Thus, as Wolfgang Langhoff put it in his opening ‘Referat’, “Die Darstellung der Wahrheit auf der Bühne mit Hilfe der Methode Stanislawskis”, the rigorous implementation of the Soviet approach was comparable to:

all den anderen großen ideologischen Kämpfen, in denen wir im Augenblick stehen, nicht nur als eine Angelegenheit unseres Handwerks, als eine ausschließlich technologische Frage der Entwicklung und Herausbildung unseres eigenen Handwerks [...], sondern wir müssen sie verstehen als einen Weg auf unserem Gebiet, [...] der von dem gesamten Volk in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik heute beschritten wird, nämlich den Weg des wirklichen Aufbaus der Grundlagen des Sozialismus, wovon unser Gebiet nur ein Teil ist.³⁸

Indeed, for the hard-line policy makers whose duty it was to administer the artistic policy, ensuring its consistency with Soviet aesthetic standards, the ‘Stanislawski-Konferenz’ would provide the opportunity to bring wayward, dissenting artists like Brecht, accused of privileging formal, ‘technologische Frage[n]’ over content, into line.

The implications of the ‘Stanislawski-Konferenz’ for the Berliner Ensemble at that time are not to be underestimated. In the months leading up to the event, Hans Mayer, a leading GDR academic, had withdrawn an article on Brecht’s theories from the East German monthly magazine *Aufbau*, following the editor’s request for a further in-depth examination of Brecht’s theoretical position regarding Stanislavski. In a letter dated 9 February 1953, Mayer informed Brecht

³⁷ ‘Ein neuer Abschnitt: Zur ersten deutschen Stanislawski-Tagung’, *TZ*, 8, no. 5 (1953), 1-5 (2 and 5).

³⁸ Wolfgang Langhoff, ‘Aus dem Schlußwort’, *TZ*, 8, no. 5 (1953), 11-12 (12).

how, disenchanted with superficial efforts to play off “einen mißverstandenen Brecht gegen einen mißverstandenen Stanislawski”, he had decided to withdraw the original article and cease any further collaboration with the journal.³⁹

Brecht’s production methods had patently become a matter of official concern – in cultural and political circles he was increasingly singled out as an ‘entschiedener Gegner Stanislawskis,’⁴⁰ and his production techniques were considered contrary to the principles of Socialist Realist theatre. Printed in the party paper *Neues Deutschland* on the first day of the ‘Stanislawski-Konferenz’, an article entitled ‘Für den Sieg des sozialistischen Realismus auf der Bühne’, alluded to the questionable standard of certain theatrical productions within the capital:

Gibt es etwa nicht noch – bekanntlich gerade auch in der Hauptstadt – Aufführungen, in denen unter der Anleitung wirklich großer Künstler sehr gut “Theater gespielt” wird und in denen dennoch der Formalismus und sein Zwillingsbruder, der Schematismus, aus allen Ecken und Winkeln schauen, angefangen bei der Auswahl der Stücke bis hin zu Dramaturgie, Regiekonzeption, Regie, Bühnenbild und schauspielerischer Methodik?

In a further paragraph the author of the article went on to ask:

Warum ist es unseren fortschrittlichen Regisseuren und Schauspielern noch nicht gelungen, diese lähmenden Erscheinungen zu überwinden? Weil sie es noch nicht verstanden haben, sich in den Besitz jener Methode zu setzen, die die Verschmelzung der Errungenschaften unserer eigenen nationalen Tradition mit den Resultaten der fortschrittlichsten Theaterkunst der Erde – der sowjetischen – gewährleistet [...]. Wenn heute unsere Bühnenkunst noch nicht die Höhe erreicht hat, die das Volk von ihr verlangt, so deshalb, weil die Methode Stanislawskis noch

³⁹ BBA 731/75. See also *GBA* 30, p. 164.

⁴⁰ Werner Hecht, ‘Grund der Empörung über eine ‘ganz unerträgliche Behandlung’’, 76.

nicht zum Gemeingut unserer Intendanten, Dramaturgen, Regisseure und Schauspieler geworden ist.⁴¹

That the author's comments were implicitly targeted at Brecht and the artistic output of the Berliner Ensemble was clear. Brecht's productions had done little to boost his popularity among officials in the GDR. Indeed, as Bruce Cook points out, having constructed an aesthetic seemingly "in direct opposition to the Stanislavski approach. [...] [Brecht] was wide open to attack by the culture commissars for his putative formalism".⁴² Thus the conference had been organised, not simply with a view to endorsing Stanislavski, but as Detlev Schöttker states, with the added aim of pitting his methods "gegen die Theorie und Praxis des epischen Theaters"⁴³. With Erpenbeck presiding over proceedings and a host of exponents of Stanislavski's methods in attendance, Brecht himself could have been in little doubt that the event would lead "zu einer Auseinandersetzung mit dem Brecht-Theater".⁴⁴ A somewhat muted journal entry written barely two weeks before the conference adequately expresses both Brecht's apprehension over the position of his theatre and his resentment towards such mounting criticism:

Unsere Aufführungen in Berlin haben fast kein Echo mehr. In der Presse erscheinen Kritiken Monate nach der Erstaufführung, und es steht nichts drin, außer ein paar kümmerlichen soziologischen Analysen. (*GBA* 27, p. 346)

⁴¹ 'Für den Sieg des Sozialistischen Realismus auf der Bühne', *Neues Deutschland*; E. Berlin, 17 April 1953, 1.

⁴² Bruce Cook, *Brecht in Exile*, p. 207.

⁴³ Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven*, p. 237.

⁴⁴ Werner Mittenzwei, *Das Leben des Bertolt Brecht oder Der Umgang mit den Welträtseln*. Vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), p. 447.

The extent to which his aesthetic recalcitrance had become a matter of official concern was further expressed by Wolfgang Langhoff at the conference. With obvious reference to Brecht, Langhoff called for official support in the battle against formalism and the endorsement of Stanislavski's methodology within East German theatre:

Wir erwarten, daß [die Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten] uns das Material zur Verfügung stellt, damit wir es verwenden und damit kämpfen können gegen solche, die noch tausend Ausreden gebrauchen, um sich nicht mit dem Stanislavski-System beschäftigen zu müssen, gegen die Auffassung, die auch hier vertreten worden ist, daß wir eigentlich schon nach Stanislavski arbeiten, wenn wir nur gut und gründlich arbeiten. Das ist eine Selbstzufriedenheit, die nicht richtig ist.⁴⁵

Whilst it is certain that Helene Weigel, Käthe Rülicke-Weiler and Peter Palitsch attended the conference, the extent of Brecht's *actual* participation is the subject of some uncertainty. Knopf claims that the conference went ahead "ohne Brecht, aber mit Helene Weigel"⁴⁶; whilst Peter Davies and Stephen Parker contend that Brecht attended on the final day.⁴⁷ Judging by his subsequent comments in a postscript note entitled 'Einige Gedanken zur Stanislavski-Konferenz', it would seem that Brecht was certainly present for the discussion which took place on the last day of the event. Taken from an interview published in the *New Theatre Quarterly*, Käthe Rülicke-Weiler's following comment confirms both his attendance at, and improvised contribution to, the conference:

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Langhoff, 'Aus dem Schlußwort', *TZ*, 8, no. 5 (1953), 11.

⁴⁶ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*, p. 465.

⁴⁷ Peter Davies and Stephen Parker, 'Brecht, SED Cultural Policy and the Issue of Authority in the Arts', in Steve Giles and Rodney Livingstone (eds), *Bertolt Brecht: Centenary Essays* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 181-95 (p. 187).

What has never been written about is that Brecht himself said something ad-lib from the back row – making some interesting points about the similarity and the differences between his own views and Stanislavski's.⁴⁸

In an article published in 1995, Carl Weber, who worked with Brecht in Berlin, describes how Brecht “asked all of his collaborators to attend and was himself watching the proceedings from the back of the conference hall”. Significantly Weber goes on to recall how:

On the second day, he [Brecht] handed me a brief statement and asked me to read it to the assembly, which I did; the response in the hall was one of muted inscrutability. Brecht had stated, after some compliments for Stanislavski's achievements, “Of Stanislavski's work methods we must adopt those which advance the individual work methods of our stage directors and actors, not those which might hinder them.” His statement was not well received by the Party's cultural experts.⁴⁹

Weber's account suggests that Brecht's application of Stanislavski's methods during the 1950s was essentially *selective* and, as such, did not represent a complete theoretical about-turn expediently engineered by Brecht to satisfy the official cultural line. However, as no record remains of either of these impromptu contributions (neither Brecht's nor Weber's statements appear in the conference protocol and may have been edited out of the transcript), Brecht's ‘Rede für die Stanislawski-Konferenz’, presented on the second day of the conference by Helene Weigel, is the closest we have to a prepared, public statement. As head of the Berliner Ensemble, Weigel had written to the ‘Staatliche Kommission für

⁴⁸ Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler interviewed by Matthais Braun, ‘Brecht and Weigel at the Berliner Ensemble’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 7, no. 25 (February 1991), 3-19 (15).

⁴⁹ Carl Weber, ‘Periods of Precarious Adjustment: Some Notes on the Theatre's Situation at the Beginning and after the End of the Socialist German State’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 4, no. 2 (1995), 23-36 (29-30).

Kunstangelegenheiten' prior to the event requesting a typescript of Langhoff's 'Referat'. She was, however, unsuccessful in her efforts to obtain an advance copy – a factor to which Brecht refers with distinct unease in 'Vorbereitung zur Stanislawski-Konferenz':

Wir haben versucht, das grundlegende Referat zu erhalten, um es einigermaßen gründlich durcharbeiten zu können, es war aber nicht möglich. Ich schlage vor, daß in Zukunft bei Kongressen dieser Bedeutung die grundlegenden Referate rechtzeitig zugestellt werden. Auch das gehört zur Gründlichkeit, die zu einer planmäßigen Entwicklung realistisch sozialistischen Theaters nötig ist. (*GBA* 23, p. 233)

The 'Referat' presented by Weigel differs slightly from that prepared by Brecht in that it contains her own improvised reactions to the contributions and criticisms of other practitioners present. Her opening comments are a personal response to Hans Rodenberg's clearly pointed claim that directors with an insufficient knowledge of Stanislavski's methods frequently revert to a formalistic approach:

Jetzt ist alles so reif, damit die Stanislawski-Diskussion richtig Fleisch bekommt, ins Leben eingeht, damit es nicht ein Geheimnis einzelner bleibt, damit die Schauspieler auch nicht mehr Opfer von Stanislawskisierungs-Experimenten einzelner Regisseure sind, die die Schauspieler selbst weder dazu ausbilden, noch wissen sie genau, was sie machen sollen, noch wissen sie, was das ist. Das ist in vielen Theatern bestimmt noch so.⁵⁰

Hans Rodenberg had been made theatre advisor at the 'Haus der Kultur der Sowjetunion' in Berlin in 1948. In 1952 he became the director of DEFA. A staunch supporter of Socialist Realism in the GDR, Rodenberg was a prominent figure in GDR 'Kulturpolitik' and an advocate of the State's endorsement of

⁵⁰ 'Ein neuer Abschnitt: Zur ersten deutschen Stanislawski-Tagung', 4.

Stanislavski's approach. In his recent autobiography, *Erinnern ist Leben*, Manfred Wekwerth recalls:

Er war der Obrigkeit wichtig, als Gegenpol zu Brecht, den Rodenberg zum Gegner Stanislawskis (also der Sowjetunion) erklärte, indem er von Brecht behauptete, daß er durch »Proletkulttendenzen« schauspielerische Leistungen »bis an die Grenze der Dürftigkeit vereinfache«.⁵¹

Weigel's response to Rodenberg indicates the extent to which, as the representative of Brecht's work at the conference, her role was very much a defensive one:⁵²

Ich bin kein Objekt und ich bin kein Opfer von Regie und Dramaturgie. Ich bin ein Erfinder, und wenn ich nur halbwegs lesen kann, so ist es Stanislawski gerade darum gegangen, uns jegliche Hilfsmittel, alle Wege zu öffnen, um unsere Erfindungsmöglichkeiten freizugeben. Ich bitte um Vorsicht, meine Herren Kollegen, von der Dramaturgie und von der Regie!⁵³

The 'Referat' cited the use of scene-titles, epoch analysis, the subtext, études and the 'method of physical action' as just a few examples among an "erstaunliche Anzahl von Methoden in unserer Arbeitsweise, die denen Stanislawskis sehr ähnlich sind" (*GBA* 23, p. 234). Bearing clear insight into Stanislavski's later theoretical concerns, the 'Referat' represents an altogether more *informed* attempt at a comparison than that conveyed in 'Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislawskis gelernt werden kann' from two years earlier. The address also referred to the role of 'Einfühlung' in the Epic Theatre: "Wir arbeiten bei Brecht keineswegs ohne Einfühlung, wenn ihm auch Einfühlung allein nicht genügt" (*GBA* 23, p. 236). The statement recalls Brecht's handling of the role of

⁵¹ Manfred Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben* (Leipzig: Faber, 2000), p. 423.

⁵² Mittenzwei compares her role at the conference to that "eines Diplomaten in der UNO". Werner Mittenzwei, *Das Leben des Bertolt Brecht oder Der Umgang mit den Welträtseln*. Vol. 2, p. 447.

⁵³ Helene Weigel, 'Gemeinsam studieren', *TZ*, 8, no. 5 (1953), 7-8 (7).

‘Einführung’ in *Der Messingkauf*, linking up with the three-phase rehearsal process outlined in ‘Stanislawski-Studien [3]’ in which empathy is presented as a permissible, yet transient, component in the actor’s work on a role and just *one* of a number of preparatory rehearsal methods. Yet, whilst it acknowledged the fact that certain differences *did* exist between Brecht’s and Stanislavski’s approach, Weigel’s address nonetheless conveyed an obvious reluctance to enter into a public discussion of them:

Ich sage nicht, daß zwischen der Arbeitsweise Brechts und der Arbeitsweise Stanislawskis eigentlich kein Unterschied besteht. Es ist klar, daß ein Unterschied besteht, wenn es auch noch nicht so klar ist, in was der Unterschied besteht oder wie groß der Unterschied ist. Dazu kennen wir Stanislawskis Arbeitsweise noch zu wenig. (GBA 23, p. 235)

Those who endeavoured to posit “eine ganz und gar künstliche Kluft” between Brecht’s work at the Berliner Ensemble and Stanislavski’s practice were dismissed as possessing an “oberflächlichen Kenntnis” of both ‘Arbeitsweisen’:

Brecht selbst kennt eine solche Kluft nicht. Er würde sonst nicht mit solchem Interesse alles ausprobieren, was er über Stanislawskis Arbeitsweise in Erfahrung bringen kann. (GBA 23, p. 235)

Rather, Weigel’s address emphasised the ‘similarities’ between the two approaches, stressing the need for both up-to-date material and further study to show exactly “wo die Anschauungen differieren”:

Wie Sie (vielleicht) gehört haben, hat das Berliner Ensemble vor einiger Zeit angefangen, die Stanislawskische Arbeitsweise zu studieren und einiges davon bei Proben von Stücken auszuprobieren. Wir haben dabei festgestellt, daß einige neue Erkenntnisse, die wir aus Veröffentlichungen von Stanislawski und seinen Schülern, sowie aus Verfilmungen von Inszenierungen gewannen, sich nicht sehr schwer in unsere eigene Arbeitsweise eingliederten. Der Grund dafür ist wohl der, daß auch wir seit vielen Jahren versuchen, realistisch zu spielen, und zwar vom sozialistischen Standpunkt aus. (GBA 23, p. 234)

Weigel's claims clearly refer to the fact that the Berliner Ensemble had begun to explore some of Stanislavski's methods in the rehearsals to Erwin Strittmatter's play *Katzgraben*. Consistent with the statement which Weber allegedly read at the conference, the 'Referat' similarly conveys the notion that the Berliner Ensemble were engaged in a *selective* application of Stanislavski's 'Arbeitsweise'. Indeed, the use of the words "einige neue Erkenntnisse" here are revealing, suggesting a cautious approach on Brecht's behalf and a clear reluctance to commit himself to the Party's demand for total compliance with, or 'Aneignung' of, the official aesthetic. This is further conveyed by the statement which begins with the assertion that "in der Methode manches ähnlich ist" and concludes with the sting in the tail: "so verschieden die qualitativen Resultate sein mögen" (*GBA* 23, p. 235). Read as a whole, the full import of the statement would again appear to imply that Brecht was only prepared to deliver a part-compromise to the dominant discourse.

Brecht's attempts to emphasise the alleged affinities between his and Stanislavski's approach did little to convince and his efforts at correlating his methods with those of Stanislavski were met with scepticism by theatre practitioners and cultural policy-makers at the conference. Rather, considerable emphasis was placed on exposing the shortcomings of Brecht's theatre. The call was for a polemic, or, as Fritz Erpenbeck put it in an article printed in *Theater der Zeit* shortly after the conference, a 'productive' discussion of the two 'Kunsttheorien'. Erpenbeck's invitation to Brecht to present his own case barely

concealed the expectation that, in true ‘show trial’ fashion, Brecht would confess to his aesthetic misdemeanours:

Mit dieser materialistisch-dialektischen Fragestellung scheint uns die Grundlage zu einer wirklichen fruchtbaren Diskussion. Wir würden es deshalb sehr begrüßen, wenn sich Bertolt Brecht zu einer Stellungnahme an dieser Stelle entschließen würde.⁵⁴

Indeed, the extent to which the conference had been conceived of as an “Anti-Brecht” event⁵⁵ is confirmed by the self-explanatory tone of ‘Ein neuer Abschnitt’, printed in *Theater der Zeit* after the conference:

Zweifellos wird es auch Meinungsverschiedenheiten mit Bertolt Brecht geben. Auf diese Meinungsverschiedenheiten und Unterschiede zwischen den Auffassungen Stanislawskis und denen Brechts wurde sowohl vom Referenten als auch von einer Reihe von Diskussionsteilnehmern hingewiesen. Selbst Helene Weigel spricht davon, wenn sie sagt: “Es ist klar, daß ein Unterschied besteht, wenn es auch nicht klar ist, wie groß der Unterschied ist.” Diese Fragen müßten offen und kameradschaftlich ausdiskutiert werden.⁵⁶ [Emphasis mine]

Yet despite the insistence that any such debate should be carried out under open and congenial conditions, the promotion of Stanislavski’s techniques within the theatre was repeatedly expressed in uncompromising and confrontational terms – as a military offensive:

Also ist es unsere Hauptaufgabe, den Kampf zu führen gegen die Unkenntnis der Methoden Stanislawskis. Selbstverständlich müssen hierbei andere veraltete Auffassungen der Schauspielkunst überwunden werden.⁵⁷

Calling for the reorganisation of the ‘Stanislawski-Zirkel’ into efficient “Kampforgane” committed to the study of Stanislavski’s System, Langhoff

⁵⁴ Fritz Erpenbeck, ‘Kleine redaktionelle Einmischung in die Debatte’, *TZ*, 8, no. 6 (1953), 14-15 (15).

⁵⁵ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*, p. 467.

⁵⁶ ‘Ein neuer Abschnitt: Zur ersten deutschen Stanislawski-Tagung’, 4.

⁵⁷ ‘Ein neuer Abschnitt: Zur ersten deutschen Stanislawski-Tagung’, 4.

defined the martial struggle to ensure the acceptance of Stanislavski's methods throughout East German theatre as a collective imperative:⁵⁸

Ich habe eines vermißt, vielleicht auch bei mir selber, aber auch bei euch, liebe Kollegen; ich habe vermißt, daß wir nicht kämpferisch diskutiert haben, daß wir das ganze nicht als einen Kampf verstanden haben, und zwar einen Kampf gegen [...] das Alte und Schlechte in uns, ein entschiedenes Parteinehmen für das, was wir den *sozialistischen Realismus* nennen, auf das Theater angewandt durch die Methode Stanislawskis.⁵⁹

Recalling the confrontational tone of the '5. Tagung des ZK der SED' two years earlier, Langhoff's words indicated the extent to which the Soviet approach was associated with the campaign against formalism and a development central to the national aspirations of the GDR. Couched in a combative rhetoric that confirmed the implementation of Stanislavski's System as synonymous with the rigorous enforcement of Socialist Realism, Langhoff's tone defined the absolute necessity of shaping a specific aesthetic identity for the GDR:

der Kampf um das Stanislawski-System [...], um den sozialistischen Realismus [kann] nur ein harter, kompromißloser, offener, starker und ehrlicher Kampf sein [...], den wir unversöhnlich führen, unversöhnlich deshalb, weil wir die Gefahren erkennen [...]. Wenn wir wissen, daß wir nicht nur einen Kampf für unsere ausschließlich fachmännischen Fragen führen, sondern daß es ein bewußter Kampf an der Seite des kämpfenden fortschrittlichen Proletariats, an der Seite der Bauernschaft, der werktätigen Intelligenz, der Künstler ist, dann wird diese Konferenz [...] in uns diesen kämpferischen Geist wachrufen.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The formation of 'Brigaden' at the Berliner Ensemble would appear to be a response to this. See the note entitled '1. Mai 1953' in which Brecht proposes "die Formierung von Brigaden" committed to, among other things, the "Studium und Kritik der Stanislawskischen Arbeitsweise", (GBA 23, p. 246).

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Langhoff, 'Aus dem Schlußwort', TZ, 8, no. 6 (1953), 10-11 (11).

⁶⁰ Wolfgang Langhoff, 'Aus dem Schlußwort', TZ, 8, no. 5 (1953), 11 and 12.

Entirely at odds with what Mittenzwei has called the “versöhnliche, die Gemeinsamkeiten hervorhebende Ton der Weigel”⁶¹, Langhoff was no less confrontational in his call for an immediate comparative analysis of Brecht’s theatre and Stanislavski’s approach:

inzwischen sollten wir Brechts großzügiges und offenherziges Angebot, mit ihm sofort und unverzüglich in eine Diskussion einzutreten, annehmen. Wir sollten sofort und ohne zu warten, bis uns sämtliches Material vorliegt, in eine solche Diskussion eintreten.⁶²

Dismissive of artists who declare “daß ‘wir eigentlich schon nach Stanislawski arbeiten’, wenn wir nur gut und gründlich arbeiten”⁶³, Langhoff rejected Weigel’s claim that many of the fundamental aspects of Stanislavski’s work were in fact reflected in Brecht’s own practice. Rather, like many of the other ‘Bühnenkünstler’ present at the conference, he concluded “daß sie in vielen *entscheidenden und wesentlichen Punkten* von dieser Methode *abweichen*.”⁶⁴

Langhoff argued that the emphasis in Brecht’s productions was one of demonstration and distance, claiming they presented, “einen wesentlichen und *entscheidenden* Unterschied zu der Methode, die wir uns mit der Stanislawskischen Arbeitsweise aneignen wollen”.⁶⁵ Questioning the role of empathy within Brecht’s theatre, Langhoff declared himself unable to reconcile

⁶¹ Werner Mittenzwei, *Das Leben des Bertolt Brecht oder Der Umgang mit den Welträtseln*. Vol. 2, p. 448.

⁶² Wolfgang Langhoff, ‘Aus dem Schlußwort’, *TZ*, 8, no. 6 (1953), 11.

⁶³ Wolfgang Langhoff, ‘Aus dem Schlußwort’, *TZ*, 8, no. 5 (1953), 11. Compare the following statement by Harald Hauser: “‘Wo gut und verantwortungsbewußt gearbeitet wird, ist immer etwas Stanislawski dabei’. Das ist es, glaube ich, was Kollegin Weigel verallgemeinert hat”. Harald Hauser, ‘Abstraktion’, *TZ*, 8, no. 6 (1953), 12-14 (12).

⁶⁴ Wolfgang Langhoff, ‘Aus dem Schlußwort’, *TZ*, 8, no. 6 (1953), 11.

⁶⁵ Wolfgang Langhoff, ‘Aus dem Schlußwort’, *TZ*, 8, no. 6 (1953), 12.

Brecht's practices with the principles formulated by Stanislavski regarding the role of 'Einfühlung':

In keinem Augenblick läßt er (der Schauspieler) es zur restlosen Verwandlung in die Figur kommen. Ein Urteil: 'Er spielte den Lear nicht, er war Lear', wäre für ihn vernichtend.⁶⁶

Langhoff's view was reinforced by *Neues Deutschland*, the official Party organ, which, shortly after the conference, directly accused Brecht of being in opposition to everything Stanislavski stood for:

In dem Maße [...], in dem das Ensemble die im »Kleinen Organon« für das Theater und in den anderen Schriften Brechts niedergelegten Auffassungen in die Praxis umzusetzen versucht, befindet es sich unleugbar im Gegensatz zu allem, was der Name Stanislavski verkörpert. Seine beiden Leiter sind sicherlich die letzten, die davor den Kopf in den Sand stecken wollen.⁶⁷

Perspective and Action: the 'Stanislavski-Studien'

Brecht-scholarship has tended to reflect the official verdict (as indicated by the views of Wolfgang Langhoff and *Neues Deutschland*), interpreting Brecht's

⁶⁶ Wolfgang Langhoff, 'Aus dem Schlußwort', *TZ*, 8, no. 6 (1953), 11. Langhoff is quoting from §48 of Brecht's *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (GBA 23, p. 83). Evidently Langhoff modified his position considerably later on. Fritz Erpenbeck criticised what he deemed the 'bloodlessness' of Langhoff's 1957 production of *König Lear*, in which Langhoff had sought to incorporate elements of Brechtian theatre. See Helmut Kreuzer, 'Zur Dramaturgie im 'östlichen' Deutschland (SBZ und DDR)', *Orbis Linguarum*, 17 (2001), 15-37 (26). In his production of Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* four years later "wird das Bemühen Langhoffs immer deutlicher, von Stanislavski den Schritt zu Brecht zu gehen, eine Synthese beider Methoden zu suchen, ohne Wertvolles der einen oder der anderen zu verlieren. "Ja, ich glaube, eine Synthese anzustreben", bestätigt Langhoff. "Nicht im Sinne einer Verdeckung der Widersprüche zwischen den Auffassungen. Worin ich Brecht folge, was er mich gelehrt hat und wofür ich ihm ungeheuer dankbar bin, ist, daß er unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf das schmucklose Erzählen der Fabel gerichtet hat". Gerhard Ebert, 'Wolfgang Langhoff', *Sonntag*, 5. October, 1961, 5.

⁶⁷ *Neues Deutschland* (E. Berlin) quoted in *Berliner Stimme* 6 June 1953.

contribution to the conference as a strategic act of tokenism. Critics have dismissed his endorsements of Stanislavski's techniques as little more than a timely exercise in self-censorship, undertaken as part of a deliberate attempt to satisfy Socialist Realist requirements. Echoing Langhoff's rejection of any parallels between the two practitioners, Frederic Ewen contests that there can be:

no fundamental reconciliation between Brecht's epic theatre and Stanislavski's insistence that "in our art you must live the part every moment that you are playing it," or you "must creep into the skin and body" of the character to be portrayed or, one must employ "conscious means to the subconscious." These were two different ways of doing theatre.⁶⁸

Whilst Jan Knopf has called the 'Rede für die Stanislavski-Konferenz' deliberately vague and "außerordentlich zurückhaltend,"⁶⁹ according to Detlev Schöttker Brecht's interest in Stanislavski:

vor allem dem Zweck diene, wenigstens den Anschein zu erwecken, als beteilige sich auch er an der allgemeinen Rezeption, um das epische Theater nicht ganz aus der Diskussion herauszukatapultieren.⁷⁰

Petra Stuber highlights "die ausweichende Taktik von Brecht und Weigel auf der Konferenz". Echoing the official view, she dismisses Brecht's attempt to establish "Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen seiner und Stanislavskis Arbeit"⁷¹ as a "taktisches Gewebe von Affirmation und Selbstbehauptung"⁷²:

Fritz Erpenbeck and Wolfgang Langhoff strichen die Gegensätzlichkeit von Brecht und Stanislavski offensiv, *aber in der Sache durchaus richtig*, heraus und votierten für Stanislavski, gegen Brecht. [Emphasis mine]⁷³

⁶⁸ Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, his Art and his Times*, p. 480.

⁶⁹ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*, p. 465.

⁷⁰ Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven*, p. 238.

⁷¹ Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 170.

⁷² Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 171.

⁷³ Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 168.

Stuber likens the 'Referat' to what she considers Weigel's similarly deliberately self-effacing contribution at the '5. Tagung des ZK der SED' two years earlier:

Versöhnlich wie ihr Beginn war auch ihr ganzer Beitrag. Statt über die offensichtlichen Differenzen zwischen Brecht und Stanislawski zu reden, verwies Helene Weigel – und Brecht selbst hatte ihr diesen Teil des Manuskripts geschrieben – auf die Gemeinsamkeiten [...]. Zu Beginn jedes Auftritts stellte sie ihre vermeintlichen Schwächen und Selbstzweifel dar, um später um so kräftiger ihre Position, und damit gleichzeitig diejenige Brechts und des Berliner Ensembles, zu verteidigen. Indem sie sich bloßstellte, ließ sie die Dummheiten der anderen deutlicher hervortreten, ohne sie jedoch zu brüskieren.⁷⁴

According to Stuber, Weigel's professed dislike of public speaking at the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' represents little more than a calculated exercise in "taktischer Bescheidenheit":

Ich bin in der traurigen Lage, sprechen zu müssen, obwohl ich nicht kann. Ich habe mir also ein paar Sachen aufnotiert nach unserem gestrigen Tag und bitte um Ihre Geduld und auch um ihr Wohlwollen; wenn mir ein Zungenschlag passiert, bitte ich, mich nicht daran aufzuhängen (das ist ja ein furchtbares Bild). Ich habe bereits in der Schule sehr schlechte Aufsätze geschrieben. Mit der Disposition hat es immer gehapert.⁷⁵

Yet, given the extent of opposition the Berliner Ensemble was facing it was hardly surprising that Brecht might attempt what has often been described as a tactical gesture of support for cultural policies. By spring 1953 the Berliner Ensemble was clearly under considerable pressure to meet official aesthetic requirements. The options open to Brecht were alarmingly simple: either confirm his adherence to the Party line by demonstrating the implementation of Stanislavski's methods within his own work or risk both political ostracism and

⁷⁴ Petra Stuber, 'Helene Weigel und ihre Rolle als Intendantin zwischen 1949 und 1954', 265-66.

⁷⁵ Petra Stuber, 'Helene Weigel und ihre Rolle als Intendantin zwischen 1949 und 1954', 265.

the possible closure of his theatre. Composed at a time when political pressure on Brecht was at its height, the 'Rede für die Stanislawski-Konferenz' provided him the opportunity to demonstrate his approval of a method which had been officially harnessed to the Socialist Realist doctrine, a prudent move which has accordingly been interpreted by commentators as a well-timed response to cultural-aesthetic requirements. Yet to view the text in isolation, as a deliberate gesture of short-term expediency, is to neglect Philpotts' cautioning against the tendency to "over-privilege tactical explanations for [Brecht's] behaviour in the GDR".⁷⁶

The 'Rede für die Stanislawski-Konferenz' is one of a series of notes, the 'Stanislawski-Studien', composed by Brecht either side of the conference during the first few months of 1953. Despite the abundance of analyses that Brecht's activities in the GDR have induced, scant attention has been directed towards a critical examination of the 'Studien'. Whilst the 'Rede für die Stanislawski-Konferenz' does indeed appear to represent a cautious and overtly conciliatory attempt by Brecht to square his own ideas with those practised by Stanislavski for the purposes of the conference, the 'Stanislawski-Studien' were, by contrast, unpublished at the time. Revealing the extent of Brecht's preparation for, and reaction to, the conference, the 'Studien' thus offer a more comprehensive account of his attitude towards Stanislavski and take into account the increased sources of information on the System which were now available to him. In contrast to the notes of the late 1930s in which Brecht had attempted to advance an alternative,

⁷⁶ Matthew Philpotts, "Aus so prosaischen Dingen wie Kartoffeln, Straßen, Traktoren werden poetische Dinge!" Brecht, *Sinn und Form*, and Strittmatter's *Katzgraben*', 56.

demystified technical vocabulary, the predominant tone of the 'Studien' is noticeably more receptive, indicating, at the very least, an effort by Brecht to moderate his former inflexibility towards Stanislavski's approach.

The 'Studien' make little direct reference to the earlier psycho-techniques and are consistent with the text written for the conference, which had similarly highlighted the physical and Brecht's use of the 'super-objective'. Brecht's residual suspicion of the introspective psycho-techniques, which he had systematically denounced in the notes of the 1930s, is evident throughout the 'Studien' in his endorsement of the 'method of physical action'. In a note entitled 'Methoden der Konzentration' Brecht compares Stanislavski's early empathic techniques to the "Methoden der Psychoanalytiker" which, in seeking to address social ills with fundamentally non-political means, are ultimately confined to exploring the *consequences* of problems rather than identifying their *cause*:

es handelte sich hier [...] um die Bekämpfung einer Krankheit sozialer Art, und sie erfolgte nicht durch soziale Mittel. So konnten nur die Folgen der Krankheit bekämpft werden, nicht ihre Gründe. (GBA 23, p. 231)

Such techniques thus remained little more than elaborate exercises in engineered consent designed to engender acquiescence in the prevailing social order. According to Frederic Ewen, however, this note *alone* is evidence that Brecht did not regard reconciliation between his work and Stanislavski's System as possible.⁷⁷ Detlev Schöttker has likewise argued that the 'Stanislavski-Studien' are, as a whole, essentially as uncompromising as the Stanislavski notes composed by Brecht during the latter half of the 1930s:

⁷⁷ Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, his Art and his Times*, p. 481.

Verändert hat sich gegenüber den dreißiger Jahren nur der Ton der Auseinandersetzung, der moderater geworden ist. Daß der erste Eindruck einer Kompromißbereitschaft aber trügt, zeigen insbesondere Brechts private Aufzeichnungen. Hier ist die Kontinuität der ablehnenden Haltung völlig eindeutig, wodurch auch die späten Stanislawski-Studien im richtigen Licht erscheinen.⁷⁸

The notion that “der Prozeß der Annäherung beider Methoden [...] löste die Gegenüberstellung von Brecht und Stanislawski in einen Zusammenhang von Brecht und Stanislawski auf”,⁷⁹ is dismissed by Knopf as historical misrepresentation:

Diese Synthese ist eine Erfindung der DDR-Brecht-Forschung, die die ursprüngliche Antithese von offizieller Kulturpolitik und Brechts Versuch der Erneuerung rückblickend versöhnt, um die erstere nicht nachträglich bloßstellen zu müssen [...]. Der Versuch Brechts, die – wirklich simplifizierenden – Auffassungen von seinem und Stanislawskis Theater zurechtzurücken (Auffassungen, die auf der sog. Konferenz fast ausschließlich vorgetragen worden sind), als Bekenntnis zu einer Synthese umzuwerten [...] ist Geschichtsklitterung.⁸⁰

Indeed Knopf rejects Brecht’s use of “das gängige Vokabular” throughout the ‘Studien’ as a tactical means “um dann mit ihm doch zu erläutern, was er will”⁸¹. Lucchesi goes a step further, accusing Brecht of playing with meanings throughout the notes:

Brecht spielt mit Meinungen, gibt sich nur scheinbar an seinem Gegenstand interessiert und suggeriert eine intellektuelle Anteilnahme, die das Gegenteil von dem meint, was sie darzustellen scheint.

⁷⁸ Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven*, p. 238.

⁷⁹ *Theater in der Zeitwende: Zur Geschichte des Dramas und des Schauspieltheaters in der DDR, 1945-1966*. Forschungsgruppe unter Leitung von Werner Mittenzwei. Vol. 1 (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1972), p. 360.

⁸⁰ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*, p. 466.

⁸¹ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*, p. 466.

Employing the tactic “des scheinbar beschränkten Verstehens”, Brecht’s endorsements of the Soviet practitioner’s methods are, Lucchesi argues, consistently ‘durch grundsätzliche Gegenpositionen bestimmt’:

So verbirgt B. seine genaue Kenntnis der Methoden verschiedentlich durch relativierende Bemerkungen wie: »wenn ich Stanislawski richtig deute« (*GBA* 23, p. 239). Diese Taktik des scheinbar beschränkten Verstehens (oder sogar des ›Nicht-Verstehens‹) beherrschte B. bereits in anderen politisch brisanten Lebenssituationen – etwa während seiner Anhörung vor dem Washingtoner HUAC Tribunal.⁸²

Similarly Schöttker questions the integrity of Brecht’s endorsements of Stanislavski’s methodology:

Obwohl es hier im Gegensatz zum offen abgrenzenden Charakter früherer Äußerungen erklärtermaßen darum gehen sollte, Stanislawskis Überlegungen auf ihre Verwendbarkeit hin zu prüfen, läßt Brecht kaum eine der Verfahrensweisen als akzeptabel gelten, sondern überführt sie in taktischer Weise der Fragwürdigkeit.⁸³

Yet whilst Brecht was no doubt subject to significant pressure from the cultural establishment to conform to the authorised aesthetic line, the ‘Studien’ nonetheless indicate that his reappraisal of Stanislavski’s methods was more than just a pragmatic manoeuvre motivated by external forces. Such criticisms overlook the fact that although their timing is suggestive, the ‘Studien’ are clearly informed by a greater insight into Stanislavskian methodology than that conveyed by the generalised references to the System in earlier notes – the spuriously conciliatory ‘Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislawskis gelernt werden kann’ included. Indeed, whilst one should approach the idea of a ‘synthesis’ with a certain degree of caution, the ‘Studien’ nevertheless indicate that Brecht had acknowledged, to

⁸² Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB4*, p. 311.

⁸³ Detlev Schöttker, *Bertolt Brechts Ästhetik des Naiven*, p. 238.

positive effect, the significant theoretical adjustments that Stanislavski had made to the System during the latter stages of his career. With repeated allusion to the ‘method of physical action’ and the ‘super-objective’, the ‘Studien’ consistently incorporate specific Stanislavskian terminology, thereby indicating, in contrast to earlier notes, a more *informed* attempt by Brecht to engage with the System in his own work.

Werner Hecht correctly attests to the significance of the theoretical revisions made by Stanislavski with regard to Brecht’s own re-evaluation of the System. Indeed, his examination of Brecht’s reception of Stanislavski during the 1950s strongly suggests that not all East German critics readily accept Knopf’s claim that “der Prozeß der Annäherung beider Methoden” represents “eine Erfindung der DDR-Brecht-Forschung”:

Von besonderer Bedeutung ist ohne Zweifel, daß Brecht nunmehr im System erhebliche Veränderungen feststellt, die Stanislawski im Verlauf der Jahrzehnte seiner Arbeit mit Schauspielern für notwendig hielt. So ist zum Beispiel für Brecht die erst nach 1930 entwickelte Theorie der physischen Handlungen Stanislawskis “vermutlich [...] bedeutendster Beitrag zu einem neuen Theater”.⁸⁴

Moving away from the intensely subjective exercises that had defined his early work towards an approach characterized by the development of a logical line of physical action, Stanislavski’s later books, *Building A Character* and *Creating A Role*, also reveal an interest in the actor’s double role, or dual *perspective*, on stage.

⁸⁴ Werner Hecht, ‘Grund der Empörung über eine ‘ganz unerträgliche Behandlung’’, 79.

Until now Brecht's familiarity with Stanislavski's System had been predominantly influenced by his knowledge of its earliest articulation, gained from both *My Life in Art* and the limited number of secondary texts available to him – which, as Hecht states, “vermittelte[n] weitestgehend noch die frühe Entwicklungsstufe Stanislawskis”.⁸⁵ Moreover, the ‘assumption’ that the methods practised by American purveyors of the System represented an unmodified implementation of Stanislavski's performance techniques had been vital to Brecht's early Stanislavski commentaries – to acknowledge otherwise would have surely run counter to his intentions. Thus, partly on account of the lack of available authoritative literature but also for strategic reasons, Brecht had associated Stanislavski's practice with an overemphasis on individual psychology and the role of ‘emotion memory’ in enabling the actor to evoke extreme emotions from his past, as practised by Strasberg. In contrast, the ‘method of physical action’ represented an area of Stanislavski's work about which comparatively little was known amongst East German theatre practitioners at the time of the conference.

Two books which undoubtedly had considerable influence on Brecht's re-evaluation of Stanislavski during the 1950s were Toporkov's *Stanislawski bei der Probe* and Nikolai Gorchakov's book *Regie: Unterricht bei Stanislawski*. Both publications are based on Stanislavski's *final* creative concerns, thereby bridging, to some extent, the gap left by other secondary literature which had largely dealt

⁸⁵ Werner Hecht, ‘Grund der Empörung über eine ‘ganz unerträgliche Behandlung’’, 76.

with the early aspects of the System. Documenting his working association with Stanislavski during the last decade of his life, Toporkov's book is a record of the Soviet theoretician's final productions. Toporkov's account of the rehearsals for Molière's *Tartuffe*, Stanislavski's last project, confirms that the director was engaged in a significant re-evaluation of certain elements of his System during the 1930s:

At that time he considered the foundation of his system to be the work on physical actions, and he brushed away all that might distract the actors from its significance. When we reminded him of his much earlier methods, he naively pretended that he didn't understand what we were talking about. Once someone asked:

"What is the nature of the 'emotional states' of the actors in this scene?"

Konstantin Sergeyevich looked surprised and said:

"'Emotional states.' What is that? I never heard of it."

That was not true. At one time this expression had been used by Stanislavski himself.⁸⁶

Stanislavski's urge for the actor to constantly reconsider his creative technique reflects his own re-evaluation of the actor's artistic methodology, towards a physical approach to the role:

Konstantin Sergeyevich directed our attention to what is the most tangible, the most concrete in each human action. Especially in his last years he gave the greatest importance to this aspect of the role, beginning his work on the character with it. Diverting the attention of the actor from "feelings," from psychology, he directed it toward the carrying out of purely physical actions. In this way the actor could penetrate in a natural way into the sphere of feelings.⁸⁷

Following the new 'method of physical action', the actor determines a logical line of action from the 'given circumstances', which will, in turn, define the inner life of the role. As Toporkov states:

⁸⁶ Vasily Osipovich Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal: The Final Years* (New York; London: Routledge, 1998), p. 157.

⁸⁷ Vasily Osipovich Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, p. 216.

Going from one episode to another, the actor gradually clarifies for himself the whole line of his behaviour [...]. Build the simplest possible scheme of the physical actions of the role [...] follow the line of these uninterrupted actions, and you will already achieved at least thirty-five percent of the role. The scheme of physical actions is the frame on which everything that makes up the essence of the human character is built. It reflects most expressively all the feelings, all the emotional experiences included in the stage character in the most convincing way.⁸⁸

Taking an example from the rehearsals of *Tartuffe*, Toporkov explains how the ‘method of physical action’ might be applied in practice:

When working with us on *Tartuffe*, Konstantin Sergeyvich invariably began with the words:

“Well, now, what is the physical line here?”

It was necessary for us to translate the scene into the language of physical actions, and the more simple the action, the better. For example, the crucial scene between Tartuffe and Elmire, with its long monologues, was reduced to very simple physical action: by subtle encouragement, Elmire succeeds in making Tartuffe fall into a trap.

“How will you do this, Elmire? We don’t need the text now. Create the scheme of your actions: how you will lure Tartuffe into your net, how you will deal with his advances. In your turn”, he said to Kedrov, who played Tartuffe, “regulate your behaviour toward Elmire in accordance with that which would be permitted to a respectable woman, the mistress of a house.”⁸⁹

In January 1953 *Theater der Zeit* published an extract from Gorchakov’s book *Regie: Unterricht bei Stanislavski*, which, like Toporkov’s account, was based on Stanislavski’s work during the later stages of his career (specifically, the period 1924-1936). As an indication of just how significant Gorchakov’s study was in detailing the later aspects of Stanislavski’s theory, when the book appeared in America in 1954, it was “explicit enough to leave no doubts about the widening

⁸⁸ Vasily Osipovich Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, pp. 215-16.

⁸⁹ Vasily Osipovich Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, pp.159-60.

breach between the System and the Method”.⁹⁰ Although the complete work was not to appear in translation in the GDR until 1959, Brecht obtained further extracts from the unpublished manuscript courtesy of Otto Lang a few days before the conference.⁹¹ His familiarity with the text is apparent throughout both the ‘Stanislawski-Studien’ and ‘»Katzgraben«-Notate’, specifically with regard to the use of ‘Lebensläufe’ and exaggeration as preparatory techniques for the actor’s work on a role – both of which will be examined in the following chapter. Wekwerth confirms the significance of Gorchakov’s book to Brecht’s reception of the System and its subsequent bearing on his own methods: “Später hat Brecht ein Buch von Gortschakov entdeckt [...] dieses Buch gab zum ersten Mal Auskunft, dass sie nicht so weit voneinander entfernt waren”.⁹² Given that Wekwerth worked closely with Brecht during the 1950s, his is a privileged perspective, and one which lends considerable weight to his comments regarding the nature of Stanislavski-reception in the GDR. In his autobiography, Wekwerth confirms that, although Stanislavski’s approach was strictly endorsed within the GDR, practitioners and ‘Kulturpolitker’ were nevertheless only familiar with the “Frühschriften Stanislawskis”, in which:

die totale Einfühlung der Schauspieler in ihre Rollen gefordert wird. Stanislawski änderte das in den dreißiger Jahre, als zum Beispiel die Schauspielerin Olga Knipper-Tschechowa sich weigerte, eine Konterrevolutionärin zu spielen, weil sie als Sowjet-Bürgerin nicht deren Gefühle teilen könne [...]. Wie Brecht verlangte der späte Stanislawski neben dem Gefühl vor allem Kritik an den Figuren.⁹³

⁹⁰ Paul Gray, ‘Stanislavski and America: A Critical Chronology’, 45.

⁹¹ Nikolai Gorchakov’s book was originally published in the Soviet Union in 1951.

⁹² Olga Fedianina, ‘Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Wekwerth’, p. 286.

⁹³ Manfred Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben*, pp. 423-24. Similarly in *Schriften: Arbeit mit Brecht*, Wekwerth confirms that, as practitioners in the GDR only had access to the early theoretical

To this extent, Willett's statement that Brecht based his picture of Stanislavsky's ideas on *secondary* literature – “on Gorchakov's book rather than any study of *An Actor Prepares* or *Building a Character*” – rather misses the point.⁹⁴ Whilst *Building A Character* was not yet available in translation in the GDR and *An Actor Prepares* detailed only the early formulations of the System, Gorchakov's book represented a significant source of information on Stanislavski's later work. Indeed, it is significant that, of the relevant literature available to Brecht, only a small selection – notably the extracts from Gorchakov's book, Toporkov's study and *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle* – contained *substantial* reference to the Soviet director's later work regarding the ‘method of physical action’. Ottofritz Gaillard's introduction to *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle* confirms that physical action represented an element of the System which had not yet been adequately clarified by available literature in the GDR:

articulations of the System, they were led to believe that these were representative of the approach in its entirety: “Lange genug hat man uns in den fünfziger Jahren die frühen Exerzitien und Ansichten Stanislawskis als dessen vollständiges System angeboten und genügend Verwirrung gestiftet,” *Schriften: Arbeit mit Brecht* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1973), pp. 46-7. In an article printed in *Theater der Zeit* in 1975, Maxim Vallentin, the arch-proponent of Stanislavski's methods in East Germany, recalled how, during the early years of the GDR, his “Haltung zu Stanislawski [...] noch ziemlich unkritisch und undifferenziert [war]”. Vallentin confesses that his understanding of the System at that time was based on the notion of total synthesis between actor and role: “Ich kannte auch nur die ›Ethik‹ und ›Mein Leben in der Kunst‹ [...]. So folgte ich Stanislawski zunächst auch in der Forderung nach der ›vollkommenen Einschließung des Schauspielers in die Rolle‹”. Vallentin states that, following the publication of *My Life in Art* in 1951: “für viele Leser war danach Stanislawski ein Theatermann, der den bürgerlichen Humanismus an seine Grenzen geführt hatte, nicht mehr. Das Interesse für den späten Stanislawski, beispielweise [für] seine Ausführungen über die ›physische Handlung‹, auch für Gortschakows ›Regie-Unterricht bei Stanislawski‹ [...] war nicht mehr stark genug”. ‘Realistische Darstellung und schöpferische Partnerschaft. Gespräch mit Maxim Vallentin’, *TZ*, no. 5 (1975) 5-6.

⁹⁴ John Willett, *Brecht in Context*, p. 215.

In den hier vorgelegten Aufsätzen [...] erhalten wir erstmals eine Darstellung der letzten Ergebnisse von Stanislawskis Forschungen [...]. Es handelt sich um die "Methode der physischen Handlungen" [...]. Ohne Kenntnis dieser Entdeckung müssen alle Teilergebnisse des "Systems" unvollständig bleiben und können sogar zu Entstellungen und Irrtümern in der Anwendung der Methode führen [...]. Diese Lücke wird durch die nachfolgenden Aufsätze vorerst geschlossen.⁹⁵

An article by Fritz Erpenbeck printed in *Theater der Zeit* further stressed the significance of the book for the study of Stanislavski's techniques, echoing Gaillard's claim that it offered a more *complete* overview of the System than that conveyed by existing Stanislavski literature:

Diese Aufsätze erleichtern dem Lernenden das Verständnis der Originalarbeiten Stanislawskis, die ja (infolge ihrer verschiedenen Entstehungszeit) nur Etappen eines manchmal sogar widerspruchsvollen Weges darstellen [...]. Eine zusammenfassende Darstellung seines Systems von ihm selbst gibt es leider nicht; hier füllen die erwähnten fünf Aufsätze *eine wesentliche Lücke*. [Emphasis mine]⁹⁶

Concerned with the working methods evolved by Stanislavski during his later years, *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle* contains a chapter entitled 'Von den physischen Handlungen' taken directly from Stanislavski's *Die Arbeit des Schauspielers an der Rolle*, which, although part-serialised in 1953 in *Theater der Zeit*, was not published in its entirety in the GDR until 1955. Brecht owned a copy of the book and its role in his re-evaluation of Stanislavski's System on the basis of the 'method of physical action' and the notion of the actor's perspective on stage is significant. Aware that Stanislavski's work on physical action during the

⁹⁵ Karl Fend and Ottofritz Gaillard (eds), *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle: Fünf Aufsätze über Stanislawskis "Methode der physischen Handlungen"*, trans. by B. Ensslen, K. Fend and K. A. Paffen, (Berlin/GDR: Bruno Henschel und Sohn, 1952), pp. 7-8.

⁹⁶ Fritz Erpenbeck, "'Wir haben einen Stanislawski-Zirkel...!'", 5.

1930s had transcended his concept of a predominantly introspective approach to characterisation, in 'Rede für die Stanislawski-Konferenz' Brecht called for the translation and publication of all available literature.⁹⁷ Elsewhere in the 'Stanislawski-Studien' Brecht argued that the German scholarship that had been published since 1945, such as Gaillard's *Das Deutsche Stanislawski-Buch*, was still based on early, subsequently modified formulations of a System, "die heute in der Sowjetunion als überholt betrachtet werden":

Die hauptsächlichen Schriften Stanislawskis und seiner Schüler müssen endlich veröffentlicht werden. Es ist nötig, die Lehren und Methoden Stanislawskis in allen Phasen seiner Theatertätigkeit kennenzulernen; jedoch ist es auch nötig, daß festgestellt wird, was er im Lauf seiner Tätigkeit als irrig oder ungenügend erkannt, kurz, was er in der letzten Phase gelehrt hat. (GBA 23, p. 233)

As Hecht points out, one clear consequence "der Lektüre Stanislawskis ist Brechts Wunsch, auf jeden Fall von diesem System mehr kennenzulernen".⁹⁸ Thus, whilst he acknowledged that one could learn "eine Menge über Stanislawskis Arbeitsweise" from available translations of Soviet secondary literature such as the books by Gorchakov and Toporkov, Brecht stressed the need for the translation of Stanislavski's *own* work on the actor's creative task. Clearly aware of the change of focus in the final phases of Stanislavski's theory, particularly with regard to the actor's use of physical action, it was the later work – specifically *Building A Character* and *Creating A Role* – that Brecht was keen to see published in the GDR:

Von Stanislawski selbst wurde nur seine Biografie »Mein Leben in der Kunst« veröffentlicht, das darin angekündigte Buch über sein System noch nicht [...] es scheint uns [...] nötig, daß Stanislawskis eigene Arbeiten über seine Methode

⁹⁷ See GBA 23, p. 235.

⁹⁸ Werner Hecht, 'Grund der Empörung über eine 'ganz unerträgliche Behandlung'', 80.

veröffentlicht sein sollten, um sie studieren zu können, ehe man sie diskutiert. (GBA 23, pp. 232-33)

Yet, in contrast to Brecht's attitude in the 1930s, during which time he appeared not to register the fact that his knowledge of this System was a mediated one (on the contrary, as we have seen, often using this factor to his own advantage), the 'Studien' convey a certain unwillingness on Brecht's part to rely on the secondary literature available in the GDR. This incongruity begins to suggest that there are more issues at work here – coupled with Brecht's concern to wait for the publication of Stanislavski's own works in translation is clearly the possibility that such a strategy would gain him extra time to further prepare his defences.

However, Brecht was not alone in his call for the publication of further, up-to-date material – in fact, his attitude summed up the general feeling of apprehension towards the System expressed by many of the practitioners present at the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz'. One speaker blamed the hitherto available literature for contributing to a "fehlerhaftes Bild von Stanislawski" amongst GDR theatre practitioners:

Wir sind geradezu gezwungen gewesen, Stanislawskis idealistische Seite besonders zu studieren; wir waren gezwungen, uns in erster Linie mit dem noch idealistischen Stanislawski zu beschäftigen.⁹⁹

Indeed, whilst an article by Otto Lang, published in *Theater der Zeit* in 1952, had indicated that Stanislavski had begun to focus on the role of physical action as a performance technique, due to the lack of available literature in translation, the

⁹⁹ Koll. Respondek, Potsdam, 'Protokoll der 1. Deutschen Stanislawski-Konferenz', quoted in Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 295.

full effect of Stanislavski's later modifications to the System had yet to be felt in the GDR:

[Stanislawski] begann seine Arbeit rein idealistisch. Psyche und Physis waren voneinander getrennt. Das System beschäftigte sich nur mit der Psychologie [...]. Die Grundlage des Systems für uns ist die Methode der physischen Handlung [...]. Die Psyche und die Physis sind ein komplizierter Komplex, der untrennbar ist.¹⁰⁰

Lang's description of the 'method of physical action' as the "Grundlage des Systems" is a smart bit of political manoeuvring which, in keeping with Soviet attempts to bring the approach into line with Marxist materialist dialectics, seeks to present the new technique not as a later phase of the System, but as *the* foundational element. The change of emphasis conveniently obfuscates the 'errors' and perceived idealism of Stanislavski's early phase of work.

Brecht's residual distrust of the early, impenetrable psychological techniques and their unsuitability for conveying the 'Fabel' is evident in 'Über unsere Inszenierungen' written at the beginning of 1952:

Ich erkenne schöpferische Prozesse geheimnisvoller und tiefer Art nicht an. Die Rolle kann einzeln erarbeitet werden, aber nicht so, daß sie dann endgültig fixiert ist. Die Hauptarbeit geschieht beim Zusammenspiel. Danach hat sich alles wieder zu ändern [...]. Wir arbeiten Situationen heraus, und endgültig entscheidet über alles die Fabel. Wir bauen nicht Figuren auf, die dann in eine Fabel hineingeworfen werden, sondern wir bauen die Fabel auf. (GBA 23, p. 192)

Likewise in 'Zu Stanislawski', a note composed in February 1953 just two months prior to the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz', Brecht writes: "Brecht ist Gegner dort, wo Autosuggestion, Trancezustände vorkommen" (GBA 23, p. 224).¹⁰¹ Moving the

¹⁰⁰ Otto Lang, 'System Stanislawski – kein Dogma', TZ, 7, no. 21, (1952), 7-8 (7).

¹⁰¹ Nonetheless a journal entry dated 20 January 1953 even attempts to justify Stanislavski's early emphasis on introspective methodology, stating that such techniques may have proven necessary

emphasis away from emotional introspection as the major orientation of a role, the ‘method of physical action’ represented a significant step towards the demystification of the actor’s performance technique. Whilst Brecht’s notes of the 1930s had criticised the central role of emotion within Stanislavski’s techniques and the actor’s ‘slavish’ identification with the character, the ‘Studien’ reflect a genuine appreciation of the new ‘method of physical action’ in its examination of the *continuum* of action and emotion.

‘Mit Studium begonnen’, an unpublished note held in the Bertolt-Brecht-Archive reconfirms the interdependence of action and emotion within Brecht’s theatre:

Man kann aus S lernen, nebenbei, daß einiges aus unserer Arbeitsweise wirklich zu den elementaren Methoden realistischer Kunst gehören, etwa, daß die Grundlage der Gefühle das Handeln ist.¹⁰²

Moving away from the earliest articulation of the System which stressed the actor’s emotional engagement with the character, according to the ‘method of physical action’ the actor now derives the character from their *actions*. Compared to the psycho-techniques, the new method begins to appear more suited to Brecht’s own intention, as expressed in ‘Die Straßenszene’, that the actor “seine Charaktere ganz und gar aus ihren Handlungen ableitet” (GBA 22.1, p. 374). Emotion is no longer the *result*, but rather an inevitable *by-product* of a technique

because only with an almost “joghaften Konzentration” could the actor create “Figuren aus der privaten bürgerlichen Späre. [...]. Nur durch Insichselbstversenkung konnte der einzelne sich aus sich selbst aufbauen, immerfort gegen den »Rest« der Gesellschaft” (GBA 27, p. 345).

¹⁰² BBA 44/07.

– a notion which was patently more consistent with Brecht's own dramatic purposes than 'emotion memory' and the empathic psycho-techniques:

Nicht den Zorn zu zeigen, sondern den Versuch, ihn zu beherrschen, nicht nur die Fahrigkeit der Betrunkenen, sondern ihre Versuche, nüchtern zu erscheinen. Emotionen in sich zu erzeugen dadurch, daß man alle ihr zuschreibbaren Äußerungen äußert. (GBA 23, p. 224)

As the author of an essay in *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle* asserts, the actor's physical exploration of the scenic episodes of a play is now the major orientation point of the role:

Am Anfang liegt dem Schauspieler nicht die innere psychologische, sondern die äußere physische Linie der Rolle am besten, die Wiedergabe der äußeren Fabel des Stückes mit ihren Episoden, mit ihren einfachsten physischen Handlungen. Am leichtesten läßt sich die Wahrheit und der Glaube bei den einfachen physischen Handlungen und Aufgaben erwecken.¹⁰³

Externalising the actor's traditionally emotional engagement with the character into units of physical action, Stanislavski's 'method of physical action' thus shifted the focus from an *exclusive* emphasis on the psychological construction of the role, to the relationship between the character and the story itself. According to Brecht:

Die Methode der »physischen Handlungen« bereitet uns beim Berliner Ensemble keine Schwierigkeiten. Brecht verlangt immer, daß der Schauspieler auf den ersten Proben hauptsächlich die Fabel, den Vorgang, die Beschäftigung zeigt, überzeugt, daß die Gefühle und Stimmungen sich dann einstellen [...]. Besonders wenn wir die Äußerungen Stanislawskis aus seiner letzten Zeit hören, haben wir den Eindruck, daß Brecht da anknüpft, wahrscheinlich ganz unbewußt, einfach auf der Suche nach realistischer Gestaltung. (GBA 23, p. 229)

¹⁰³ W. Prokofjew, 'Die physischen Handlungen und die Arbeit an der Rolle', in *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle*, pp. 21-93 (p. 50).

Lucchesi has queried Brecht's use of the word 'unbewußt' here, arguing that it is "ein Hinweis darauf [...], wie ironisch dieser Text zu werten ist". The implication is that Brecht "spielt mit Meinungen" in order to deflect any suggestion that his endorsement of Stanislavski's methodology is purely strategic.¹⁰⁴ Lucchesi's charge is a valid one: if Brecht's consciously composed piece can effectively present his use of physical action and its concurrence with Stanislavski's practice as an 'unconscious' accomplishment, then he cannot be accused of trying to conveniently toe the cultural line at a time of immense political pressure. Nonetheless, as the effect of the 'method of physical action' was, in Stanislavski's own words, to "convey the externals of the plot with its episodes, with its simplest objectives" to the audience,¹⁰⁵ the new technique does begin to display a consistency with Brecht's own concern – in *Kleines Organon für das Theater*, above all – with the structure and significance of the 'Fabel'. The story, Brecht states in the *Kleines Organon*, is "das große Unternehmen des Theaters":

Auf die »Fabel« kommt alles an, sie ist das Herzstück der theatralischen Veranstaltung. Denn von dem, was *zwischen* den Menschen vorgeht, bekommen sie ja alles, was diskutierbar, kritisierbar, änderbar sein kann. Auch wenn der besondere Mensch, den der Schauspieler vorführt, schließlich zu mehr passen muß als nur zu dem, was geschieht, so doch hauptsächlich deswegen, weil das Geschehnis um so auffälliger sein wird, wenn es sich an einem besonderen Menschen vollzieht. (*GBA* 23, p. 92)

In an essay entitled 'Handlung, Wort, Überaufgabe', Toporkov described the centrality of physical action to the 'Bühnenhandlung' in directing the audience's attention to the narrative of the play:

¹⁰⁴ Jan Knopf (ed.), *BHB4*, p. 311.

¹⁰⁵ Constantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, p. 215.

Die Schauspieler müssen ein solch ausdrucksvolles Bild von ihrem physischen Verhalten und ihren Taten auf der Bühne schaffen, daß der Zuschauer, ohne den Text zu hören, schon an dem äußeren, physischen Benehmen der Schauspieler eine genaue Vorstellung vom dem erhält, was auf der Bühne vor sich geht.¹⁰⁶

In a Brechtian production the character is derived from his actions which are, in turn, governed by external forces. The realisation of actions and incidents is thus the major orientation point of the role, underscoring the plot and its socio-historical determinants, and thereby enabling an emphasis on the sociological rather than the purely psychological. Brecht stresses the same point in 'Das »Kleine Organon« und Stanislawskis System', written shortly after the conference:

Die physischen Handlungen, um Stanislawskis Terminus zu gebrauchen, dienen nicht mehr nur dazu, die Rolle realistisch aufzubauen; sie werden zum Hauptorientierungspunkt für die Rolle, nämlich in Gestalt der Fabel. (GBA 25, p. 581)

The 'method of physical action' did not merely represent a means of externalising the character's emotional state; rather, it presented a way of emphasising the events of a play and, by extension, the social significance of the story itself. For the first time Brecht understood that Stanislavski's approach could be applied to transmit the narrative of the play. In 'Einige Gedanken zur Stanislawski-Konferenz' he questioned Langhoff's application of the 'method of physical action' in his production of *Egmont* which, produced according to Stanislavskian methods, had opened proceedings at the conference:

Vielleicht bedeutet es nur meine eigene Unkenntnis, aber in der Frage der physischen Handlungen stimme ich ebenfalls nicht mit Langhoff überein. Es kann sich da meiner Ansicht nach nicht darum handeln, wie die Regentin ihre Nervosität und Egmont seine Todesfurcht ausdrückt (– durch die oder jene Gänge).

¹⁰⁶ W. Toporkow, 'Handlung, Wort, Überaufgabe' in *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle*, pp. 94-119 (p. 100).

Too much emphasis had allegedly been placed on the emotional portrayal of the central figure at the expense of the ideological and social implications of the plot:

Es handelt sich meiner Auffassung nach nicht nur darum, wie das private Innenleben oder die und jene Eigenschaft der Figuren durch äußere Handlung [...] bemerkbar gemacht werden kann. Sondern es sollen die Emotionen der Figuren der von ihnen nicht unmittelbar abhängigen Handlung des Stückes untergeordnet durch diese ausgelöst werden. (*GBA* 23, p. 238)¹⁰⁷

Manifestations of emotion which are not dependent on, or directly derived from, the action of the play should, Brecht claimed, be left to emerge from the portrayed events:

[Stanislawski] bekämpft mit aller Kraft die üble Gewohnheit vieler Schauspieler, die Fabel des Stücks sozusagen nur als unbedeutende Voraussetzung ihrer Gefühlsakrobatik zu benutzen, wie der Turner den Barren benutzt, um seine Gewandtheit zu beweisen. (*GBA* 23, p. 229)

Indeed, one outcome of the conference was that thorough study of the ‘method of physical action’ was seen to be required. Referring to the “mangelnden Kenntnis” of the System – “nämlich der Technik der physischen Handlungen” – Langhoff himself admitted that “über den Charakter dieser physischen Handlungen bestehen bei uns noch große Unklarheiten”.¹⁰⁸ In his closing address, Langhoff concluded that the discussion had raised many important issues, including the fact that:

wir uns alle über das System selbst noch nicht klar sind. Wir sehen, daß wir über viele Grundfragen der physischen Handlungen [...] noch nicht klargeworden sind.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ In an improvised addendum to her conference ‘Referat’, Weigel underlined the same point: “Ich glaube richtig verstanden zu haben, wenn ich meine, daß der durch Emotion bedingte Gang des “Egmont” noch keine physische Handlung ist”. Helene Weigel, ‘Gemeinsam studieren’, 8.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Protokoll der 1. Deutschen Stanislawski-Konferenz’, in Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 275 and p. 279.

¹⁰⁹ Wolfgang Langhoff, ‘Aus dem Schlußwort’, *TZ*, 8, no. 5 (1953), 11.

In a highly significant move, Brecht wrote personally to Toporkov in 1955, praising *K. S. Stanislowski bei der Probe*, as “ein Standardwerk, das ich mir vom Theaterinstitut noch vor der Drucklegung schicken ließ”, adding “es ist bisher meine beste Quelle über die Arbeitsweise Stanislowskis” (*GBA* 30, p. 354).¹¹⁰ Inspection of Brecht’s own copy of the book confirms his interest in the ‘method of physical action’, revealing a consistency with the views expressed throughout the ‘Stanislowski-Studien’. Several passages have been marked by Brecht, suggesting a close reading of the text. A pencil line in the margin alongside the following extract from Toporkov’s account of the rehearsals of *The Embezzlers* indicates its significance:

Die Umstellung des Schauspielers Aufmerksamkeit von der Sache nach den Gefühlen in sich selbst auf die Ausführung von Bühnenaufgaben ist eine der großen Entdeckungen Stanislowskis, eine Entdeckung, die das große Problem unserer Technik löst [...]. Er erlöste den Schauspieler von der quälenden Sorge um das Emotionale, nahm dem Schauspieler die Möglichkeiten, sich an seinen Gefühlen zu ergötzen, und zeigte den sichersten und einzig richtigen Weg zur Erschließung echter menschlicher Gefühle beim Schauspieler, und zwar solche Gefühle, die auf die Erfüllung der den Partner aktiv beeinflussenden Bühnenaufgabe gerichtet sind.¹¹¹

The thrust of the extract is clearly echoed by Brecht in a note entitled ‘Stanislowskis Theorie der physischen Handlungen’:

Stanislowskis Theorie der physischen Handlungen ist vermutlich sein bedeutendster Beitrag zu einem neuen Theater. Er arbeitete sie aus unter dem Einfluß des Sowjetlebens und seiner materialistischen Tendenzen. Mit den schrecklichen Krämpfen, die es den Schauspielern kostete, ihre Rolle vom Psychischen her zu

¹¹⁰ The letter also conveys, somewhat surprisingly considering Toporkov’s status as an entrenched Stanislavskian, Brecht’s enthusiasm concerning his plans to stage *Leben des Galilei*: “Sie drückten, wie ich höre, Interesse aus an der Figur des Galilei. Das Stück wird im Augenblick übersetzt, und ich bin sicher, Sie können eine Abschrift entweder vom Genossen Fradkin vom Schriftstellerverband oder vom Verlag für Ausländische Literatur bekommen” (*GBA* 30, p. 354).

¹¹¹ W. Toporkow, *K.S. Stanislowski bei der Probe* (Berlin/GDR: Henschelverlag, 1952), p. 42.

gestalten, wurden manche der Methoden, sie zu lindern, überflüssig. (GBA 23, p. 228)

Recommending the actor's 'Verschmelzung' into the role, in his closing address at the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz', Langhoff had criticised the dialectical element of the Brechtian actor's performance technique as contrary to the Stanislavskian aim of total synthesis between performer and role:

[Brecht] wünscht sich, daß [...] dieser Verschmelzungsprozeß wieder *in seine beiden Teile aufgelöst* wird: nämlich in den kritisch denkenden Darsteller auf der einen Seite und in die darzustellende Figur auf der anderen Seite. *Dadurch* entsteht gerade das, was viele befremdet: die Möglichkeit, den Ideengehalt eines Werkes wirklich aufnehmen zu können, wird zerstört, weil der Zuschauer nicht die Wirklichkeit in einem *lebendigen künstlerischen Abbild*, in einer *organischen* Gefühle, Sinn und Verstand und alle übrigen Kräfte des Menschen mobilisierenden Weise erleben kann, sondern weil er sich objektiv gegenübergestellt sieht: einem *Aufzeigenden* und einer *aufgezeigten Figur*.¹¹²

Yet, as Stanislavski's later books, *Building A Character* and *Creating A Role*, increasingly show, the perspective of the actor on stage also represents an important element within the later formulations of the System.¹¹³ According to Dennis C. Beck, Stanislavski explored "the implication that the person of the actor constituted a theatrical reality onstage as significant as the dramatic reality of the character."¹¹⁴ The notion of perspectivized acting as an 'overlapping'

¹¹² Wolfgang Langhoff, 'Aus dem Schlußwort', *TZ*, 8, no. 6 (1953), 12.

¹¹³ Accordingly, as Sharon M. Carnicke explains, it was only much later that Lee Strasberg began to address the element of 'perspective' in his acting instruction: "He explained it to members of the Actor's Studio in 1960, that 'As Stanislavsky defines it, the actor goes on stage and the character does this and therefore you see both the character and the actor on stage, almost standing apart'". *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 122.

¹¹⁴ Dennis C. Beck, 'The Paradox of the Method Actor: Rethinking the Stanislavsky Legacy', p. 266.

Stanislavskian-Epic concept has been collectively overlooked by secondary literature on Brecht's reception of Stanislavski. An examination of *Building A Character* demonstrates that the Soviet practitioner likewise advocated a process according to which the actor preserves a position *outside* of the character in the 'given circumstances':

One half of an actor's soul is absorbed by his super-objective, by the through line of action, the subtext, his inner images, the elements which go to make up his inner creative state. But the other half of it continues to operate on a psycho-technique [...]. An actor is split into two parts when he is acting [...]. The one is the perspective of the role. The other is the perspective of the actor.¹¹⁵

Aligning his attention to a line of action culminating in the 'super-objective', the actor enables the audience's awareness of this duality:

Can one project any single part of [...] a role without bearing in mind the perspective of the whole? [...] As a part moves along we have, as you might say, two perspectives in mind. The one is related to the character portrayed, the other to the actor.¹¹⁶

Similarly, in the following extract, also from *Building A Character*, Stanislavski stresses the importance of *perspective* within the imaginative process of character building:

while I was playing the part of the Critic I still did not lose the sense of being myself [...]. Actually I was my own observer at the same time that another part of me was being a fault-finding, critical creature [...]. I divided myself, as it were, into two personalities. One continued as an actor, the other was an observer. Strangely enough this duality not only did not impede, it actually promoted my creative work.¹¹⁷

The actor's projection into the role is thus accompanied by a perspective outside

¹¹⁵ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, p. 173.

¹¹⁶ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, p. 179.

¹¹⁷ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, p. 21.

of the character and the contradiction between identification and distance is incorporated into the performance itself. An essay by Boris Sachawa from *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle* further describes this aspect of Stanislavski's later thinking:

[Der] Schauspieler, der aufrichtig das Innenleben der Gestalt lebt ("er glaubt" an die Wahrheit dieses Lebens), gleichzeitig aber nicht vergißt, daß er Schauspieler ist und sich auf der Bühne befindet.¹¹⁸

Elsewhere in the article Sachawa states that the process of empathic identification should not become the theatre's sole aim, to the detriment of its social function. On the contrary, the actor, Sachawa explains, must ensure that "das Subjektive der Rolle – die Erlebnisse der Gestalt" does not become the "Hauptgegenstand der Darstellung":

Es ist aber [...] falsch, wenn der Vorgang des Erlebens zum Selbstzweck des Theaters wird und der Schauspieler im Erleben der Gefühle seiner Rolle den ganzen Sinn und die Bestimmung der Kunst sieht. Jedem Schauspieler des psychologischen Theaters droht aber diese Gefahr, wenn er die objektive Seite des menschlichen Verhaltens und der gesellschaftlichen Aufgaben der Kunst unterschätzt.¹¹⁹

Instead, presenting two levels of experience on stage – that of participant *and* observer – the actor, in effect, becomes 'authorial'¹²⁰:

His own perspective, as the person playing the role, is necessary to him so that at every given moment while he is on the stage he will be in a position to assess his inner creative powers and ability to express them in external terms.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Boris Sachawa, 'Die Natur der Schauspielkunst. Handlung – die Grundlage der Theaterkunst', in *Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle*, pp. 120-45 (p. 134).

¹¹⁹ Boris Sachawa, 'Die Natur der Schauspielkunst. Handlung – die Grundlage der Theaterkunst', pp. 127-28.

¹²⁰ Dennis C. Beck, 'The Paradox of the Method Actor: Rethinking the Stanislavsky Legacy', p. 267.

¹²¹ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, pp. 180-81.

Stanislavski's concept of the actor's dual perspective enables two levels of insight, lending the performance a "kommentarisches Element" (although not necessarily a political one) as well as asserting, as Dennis C. Beck states:

the humanity and agency of the individual/actor while also providing [...] a framework within which identities and their formative influences can be questioned and critiqued.¹²²

This element of the System is also discussed by Nikolai Abalkin in his book *Das Stanislavski-System und das Sowjet-Theater* which, according to *GBA* vol. 25, Brecht had read (p. 544). Abalkin introduces the reader to:

eine neue wichtige These des Systems – *die Perspektive des Schauspielers und der Rolle* – die eine direkte Beziehung zur durchgehenden Handlung und zur Überaufgabe hat [...]. Eine klare und feste Perspektive muß alle Bühnenhandlungen durchdringen: jeden Gedanken und jede Geste, jeden Satz und jede Bewegung [...]. Nicht eine einzige physische Handlung, nicht ein einziges Erleben von Gefühlen und Leidenschaften und nicht ein einziger Gedanke darf ohne die Perspektive wiedergegeben werden, die zum Endziel der Schöpfung, zur Überaufgabe führt.¹²³

Again, the implication is that in order for the characters to fulfil their 'super-objective', the actor would necessarily have to maintain a degree of disconnection, or *perspective*, from his or her role:

Wenn der Schauspieler den ersten Akt seiner Rolle beginnt, darf er das Folgende seiner Rolle nicht vergessen, er darf den letzten Akt nicht aus dem Auge lassen. Er darf die Rolle nicht blind ausführen.¹²⁴

¹²² Dennis C. Beck, 'The Paradox of the Method Actor: Rethinking the Stanislavsky Legacy', pp. 261-62.

¹²³ Nikolai Abalkin, *Das Stanislavski-System und das Sowjet-Theater* (Berlin/GDR: Henschelverlag, 1953), pp. 179-80.

¹²⁴ Nikolai Abalkin, *Das Stanislavski-System und das Sowjet-Theater*, p. 179.

In his 'Rede für die Stanislawski-Konferenz' Brecht had identified the significance of the 'super-objective' for the performer:

Stanislawskis Theorie von der Überaufgabe beweist, daß er zwar die volle, runde, menschliche Gestalt *verlangt*, aber Brecht verlangt sie auch, geht ebenfalls immer von dem aus, was Stanislawski Überaufgabe nennt. (GBA 23, p. 236)

Focusing on an end objective, and effectively aware of the outcome of the play, the actor is deterred from achieving total fusion with his part, thereby preventing the audience from identifying with the character and promoting emotions conducive to constructive critical analysis. In a note entitled 'Das »Kleine Organon« und Stanislawskis System', written shortly after the conference, Brecht confirmed the importance of the 'super-objective' and perspective to the actor's social task, acknowledging the change of focus in Stanislavski's later work and drawing affinities with his own practice:

seine Lehre hat wohl auch in den vier Jahrzehnten seiner Theaterarbeit bedeutende Wandlungen durchgemacht, wie die paar Bücher, die bei uns von Schülern veröffentlicht sind, zeigen. Zumindest ein wichtiger Bestandteil seiner Theorie, nämlich das, was er die Überaufgabe nennt, scheint darauf hinzuweisen, daß er sich des Problems, das im »Kleinen Organon« behandelt wird, bewußt war.

In order to ensure that the character fulfils the 'super-objective' the actor would necessarily have to maintain a certain detachment from his or her role. The note goes on to describe how, in striving to fulfil the 'super-objective', the actor is prevented from forming an exclusively empathic bond with the character:

Der Schauspieler steht ja tatsächlich auf der Bühne als Schauspieler und als Stückfigur zugleich, und dieser Widerspruch muß sich in seinem Bewußtsein vorfinden; er macht die Gestalt recht eigentlich lebendig. Das wird jeder Dialektiker verstehen. Stanislawskis Überaufgabe erfüllend, vertritt der Schauspieler ebenso tatsächlich die Gesellschaft gegenüber seiner Figur, auch bei Stanislawski. (GBA 25, p. 580)

As Stanislavski explains in *Building A Character*, the element of perspective in a role also enables the actor to look back at events from a detached and *historicised* viewpoint:

The future in a part is its super-objective. Let the character keep moving towards it. It will do no harm if the actor meanwhile remembers for a second the whole line of his role [...]. You need that rapid glance into the past and the future in order to make a proper estimate of the present action, and the better you sense its relationship to the whole play the easier it will be for you to focus the full extent of your attention on it.¹²⁵

In contrast to the purely introspective function of the early psycho-techniques, Stanislavski's recommendation that the artist cast "that rapid glance into the past and the future" whilst keeping "his eyes on the final, culminating point of the play"¹²⁶ is much closer to Brecht's idea, as expressed in *Der Messingkauf*, that the actor should perform a play with a foreknowledge of its outcome:

DER PHILOSOPH: Und der Schauspieler, der weiß, daß er später am Abend den Platz seines Mitspielers wird einnehmen müssen, spielt auch anders, als wenn er das nicht weiß, denke ich. Er wird den Henker, anders darstellen, wenn er daran denkt, daß er auch das Opfer wird darzustellen haben. [...]

DER DRAMATURG: Also alle Szenen im Hinblick auf mögliche andere Szenen spielen, meinst du?

DER PHILOSOPH: Ja. (GBA 22.2, pp. 742-43)¹²⁷

The actor, the Philosopher states in a further, unassigned, fragment, must adopt "einen deutlichen Abstand von der Figur" – a *historicised* standpoint, "der nicht

¹²⁵ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, p. 180.

¹²⁶ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, p. 181.

¹²⁷ Similarly in the poem 'Darstellung von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in einem' (GBA 14, pp. 372-73) Brecht suggests that the actor must frustrate the audience's tendency to believe that the events on stage are happening for the first and only time by conveying the sense that "dieser Augenblick / Auf eurer Bühne oft wiederholt wird, gestern erst / Spieltet ihr ihn, und auch morgen soll / Sind da nur Zuschauer, wieder die Vorstellung sein".

nur außerhalb der Sphäre der Figur, sondern auch weiter vorn in der Entwicklung liegt” (GBA 22.2, p. 819). The point is reiterated in *Kleines Organon für das Theater*, where Brecht states that “es [...] in seinem Spiel durchaus ersichtlich sein [soll], daß »er [the actor] schon am Anfang und in der Mitte das Ende weiß«” (GBA 23, p. 84). Taking his collaboration with Charles Laughton in the role of Galileo as an example, the *Kleines Organon* further articulates Brecht’s own definition of the actor’s double role on stage:

Dies, daß der Schauspieler in zweifacher Gestalt auf der Bühne steht, als Laughton und als Galilei, daß der zeigende Laughton nicht verschwindet in dem gezeigten Galilei [...] bedeutet schließlich nicht mehr, als daß der wirkliche, der profane Vorgang nicht mehr verschleiert wird – steht doch auf der Bühne tatsächlich Laughton und zeigt, wie er sich den Galilei denkt. (GBA 23, p. 83)

In order to achieve this ‘zweifache Gestalt’, the actor demonstrates that events have been rehearsed and are not taking place “zum erstenmal und einmalig”. Focused on the culminating point of the ‘Fabel’ the Brechtian actor likewise takes into account “the whole line of his role”. By casting “that rapid glance into the past”, he is able to narrate the story from an informed and *historicised* perspective:

In lebendiger Darstellung erzählt er die Geschichte seiner Figur, mehr wissend als diese und das »Jetzt« wie das »Hier« nicht als eine Fiktion, ermöglicht durch die Spielregel, setzend, sondern es trennend vom Gestern und dem andern Ort, wodurch die Verknüpfung der Begebnisse sichtbar werden kann. (GBA 23, p. 84)

In a further example from the *Kleines Organon*, Brecht explains how the illusion that “der Schauspieler [...] die Figur [sei] und die Vorführung [...] das Geschehnis [sei]” may be prevented if the role is effectively ‘historisiert’. The actor presents the character as though they had lived through a certain period and was now *recalling* past events in front of an audience – once again assuming an advanced perspective superior to that of the character:

Die Schauspielerin so spielte, als ob die Frau die ganze Epoche zu Ende gelebt hätte und nun, aus der Erinnerung, von ihrem Wissen des Weitergehens her, das äußerte, was von ihren Äußerungen für diesen Zeitpunkt wichtig war, denn wichtig ist da, was wichtig wurde. (GBA 23, p. 85)

Marla Carlson develops the notion of the actor's double role in her essay on 'Acting and Answerability', dismissing the idea that Stanislavskian performers merely 'reincarnate' as the character on stage. Only by exercising an element of *perspective*, she argues, may the role be rendered cognitively meaningful by the actor: 'without a return to a position outside the other, one cannot be effective either ethically or aesthetically; one can merely be "infected"' – a notion which coincides with Brecht's own rejection of 'emotionelle Ansteckung'.¹²⁸ The idea of the actor 'stepping back and shaping the character from a position *outside*' is, she stresses, a process also conveyed in Stanislavski's later methodology:

When fully experiencing from within the character, the actor is at best a passive tool [...]. But Stanislavsky, in fact, recommends a complex process by means of which actors imagine themselves in the dramatic circumstances, imagine themselves within a character's life, imagine life from a different perspective, but constantly return to themselves and adjust [...]. Being a participant in the fantasy does not [...] necessarily entail adopting the *viewpoint* of a participant.¹²⁹

The implication is that such a process promotes a critical attitude beyond the purely experiential. Indeed, in *Building A Character*, Stanislavski himself states:

Only after an actor has thought through, analysed and felt himself to be a living person inside his whole part there opens up to him the long, beautiful, beckoning perspective. His speech becomes, as it were, far-sighted, no longer the myopic vision it was at the start. Against this depth of background he can play out whole actions,

¹²⁸ Marla Carlson, 'Acting and Answerability', p. 86.

¹²⁹ Marla Carlson, 'Acting and Answerability', pp. 87-88.

speaking whole thoughts, rather than be held to limited objectives, separate phrases and words.¹³⁰

This process is reflected in Brecht's own methodology, as our earlier discussion of *Der Messingkauf* has shown (pp. 178-86). Outlined further in 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]', the actor's identification with the character is presented as one phase in a complex, preparatory process culminating in a specifically social perspective:

Die zweite Phase ist die der Einfühlung, der Suche nach der Wahrheit der Figur im subjektiven Sinn, du läßt sie machen, was *sie* will, wie sie es will, die Kritik soll der Teufel holen [...]. Du läßt deine Figur reagieren auf die andern Figuren, auf das Milieu, auf die besondere Fabel, in der einfachsten, nämlich der natürlichsten Weise. Dieses Sammeln geht langsam vor sich, bis es dann doch zum Sprung kommt, bis du in die endliche Figur hineinstürzt, dich mit ihr vereinigst. (GBA 23, p. 228)

In contrast to the emotional 'contagion', which forces the spectator into a passive identification with the characters on stage, the process encourages an empathic approach in accordance with the new social responsibility of the theatre. Identification is permitted – even encouraged – yet its application is controlled and pragmatic. Kept within prescribed boundaries, the technique is explored in order to further the actor's social insight. As Brecht had pointed out in *Kleines Organon für das Theater*, feeling himself into the role, the actor explores empathic contact with the character as just *one* of a number of methods of observation during his groundwork on a part:

Wenn auch beim Probieren Einfühlung in die Figur benutzt werden kann, [...] darf dies doch nur als eine unter mehreren Methoden der Beobachtung angewendet werden. Sie ist beim Probieren von Nutzen, hat sie doch selbst in der maßlosen

¹³⁰ Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, p. 177.

Anwendung durch das zeitgenössische Theater zu einer sehr verfeinerten Charakterzeichnung geführt. (GBA 23, pp. 85-86)

Whilst the text was written in conjunction with the ‘Stanislawski-Konferenz’, that the approach described in the second phase of ‘Stanislawski-Studien [3]’ merely represents a tactical or short-term, provisional gesture on Brecht’s part seems unlikely, if one recalls his earlier theorising on the role of ‘Einfühlung’ in the rehearsal process. Predating ‘Stanislawski-Studien [3]’ by some eighteen years, ‘Über die Bezeichnung »restlose Verwandlung«’ suggests that the technique of actor/character identification would have to be rethought in the context of the aesthetic developments made by the Epic Theatre:

Es ist für uns, damit wir weiterschreiten können, unbedingt nötig, die restlose Verwandlung als einen positiven, kunstvollen Akt zu erkennen, eine schwierige Sache [...]. Wird dieser Status verlassen, so ist dieses Verlassen *keineswegs ein völliges*. (GBA 22.1, p. 180) [Emphasis mine]

Brecht’s ‘Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt’, written five years later, had begun to consider how this might be achieved, acknowledging the significance of ‘Einfühlung’ within the rehearsal stages of the characterisation process:

Er wird aber, im Gegensatz zu der üblichen Art des Theaterspielens, wo der Akt bei der Vorführung selber vollzogen wird, und zwar zu dem Zweck, den Zuschauer zu einem gleichen Akt zu bewegen, den Akt der Einfühlung nur in einem Vorstadium, irgendwann bei der Rollendarbeit in den Proben, vollziehen. (GBA 22.2, p. 642)

His subsequent, detailed handling of the technique in both *Der Messingkauf* and the Finnish journal entry of 1941 strongly suggests that Brecht was theorising a place for ‘Einfühlung’ at the rehearsal stage more than a decade earlier than the ‘Stanislawskian-Studien’. Like ‘Stanislawski-Studien [3]’, each of these earlier

compositions acknowledges the merits of Stanislavski's call for the actor to penetrate the inner life of the character at some stage during their imaginative work on a role. That 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]' advocates a similar approach to empathy as these early notes would begin to suggest that the conciliatory position maintained by Brecht in the 1950s was, as Philpotts has argued, "a genuine one".¹³¹

Yet Brecht's recommendation in the final part of 'Stanislawski-Studien [3]' that the actor consider the role "von außen, von der Gesellschaft aus" nonetheless implies that Stanislavski's System lacks any equivalent *political* function. Having imagined himself within the dramatic circumstances of the character's reality, the Epic actor is required to draw back from the role and consider the figure from a socially conscious 'position outside the other'. The actor's social demonstration of the character constitutes the last phase in the actor's preparatory work on a role and the most vital of the three stages of characterisation. The actor identifies with the role before going on to explore the character beyond the confines of orthodox empathic identification, experiencing the part, whilst ultimately maintaining a perspective from which to access the social significance of the 'Fabel'. The process thereby lends a critical distance to an otherwise overtly subjective operation, transforming it into a dialectical and politicised act.¹³² It was this

¹³¹ Matthew Philpotts, "“Aus so prosaischen Dingen wie Kartoffeln, Straßen, Traktoren werden poetische Dinge!” Brecht, *Sinn und Form*, and Strittmatter's *Katzgraben*", 69.

¹³² Brecht's three-part characterisation process underlines the notion of the character as raw material or 'wandelnde Rohstoffe' – imprecise, contradictory and capable of astounding the audience. Indeed, the product is mirrored in the methodology itself, which as Brecht points out, is

balanced synthesis of social criticism and emotional justification which, Brecht claimed at the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz', had been absent from Langhoff's production of *Egmont*. The intertwining of subjective 'Rechtfertigung' and social 'Beurteilung' represents the essence of the characterisation process outlined by Brecht – a dialectic, which underlines the actor's social duty to the audience:

Als Glieder einer sich schnell entwickelnden Gesellschaft wollen wir vom Theater nicht nur wissen, wie die Menschen sind, sondern auch, wie sie zu entwickeln sind. Dazu ist es nötig, daß der Schauspieler uns Menschen mit all ihrer subjektiven Rechtfertigung vorstellt, darüber hinaus aber auch noch seine Beurteilung dieser Menschen vom gesellschaftlichen Standpunkt aus gibt, gefühlsmäßig und verstandesmäßig. (GBA 23, p. 232)

In spite of the dual focus implicit in Stanislavski's notion of 'perspectivised' acting, it is by no means synonymous with the dialectical nature of the Brechtian actor's 'zweifache Gestalt' on stage. Brecht develops the concept of the actor's double role to social ends. Emphasising the possibility of alternative action, the actor's demonstration that he does not necessarily share the perspective of the character is undertaken for specifically political purposes: "vom gesellschaftlichen Standpunkt aus". Within this dialectic of criticism and acceptance, the actor communicates two levels of insight to the audience, co-ordinating:

einen Widerstreit der Gefühle und Meinungen [...], wenn er eine Figur der Dichtung darstellt, einen Widerstreit seiner Gefühle mit denen der Figur, seiner Meinungen mit denen der Figur. (GBA 23, p. 232)

similarly inexact, reflecting the actor's exploration of the polarities of participant and observer: "Man muß vielleicht noch hinzufügen, daß bei der praktischen Probenarbeit nicht alles säuberlich nach dem skizzierten Schema vor sich geht, die Entwicklung der Figur geschieht unregelmäßig, die Phasen verschieben sich häufig ineinander" (GBA 23, p. 228).

Nonetheless, in contrast to the essays of the late 1930s which had erected deliberate 'Kontrafakturen' to the System, there is a clear tendency in Brecht's Stanislavski notes of the GDR period to both overstate similarities and underplay the apolitical nature of Stanislavskian theatre. Whereas Brecht had argued in 'Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst' that, in order for the oriental theatre techniques to be 'transportabel', they would have to be politicised, the 'Transportabilität' of Stanislavski's methods is complicated by the paradoxical position in which Brecht found himself during the 1950s. Obligated on the one hand to adopt a receptive stance to the dominant discourse, Brecht simultaneously needed to establish that not only had he been the first to address such aesthetic issues but also, as the *Katzgraben* production would attempt to show, that the use of perspective and physical action in the Epic Theatre represented an advance in contrast to their apolitical function in Stanislavski's System.

CHAPTER 4

BRECHT'S PRODUCTION OF ERWIN STRITTMATTER'S *KATZGRABEN*

Redefining the importance of Stanislavskian Principles

Brecht had been working with Erwin Strittmatter on the stage adaptation of his play *Katzgraben* since the summer of 1952. Rehearsals began on 24 February 1953 – a month after the 'Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten' had announced the Stanislavski Conference. 'Stanislawski-Studien [1]', written in preparation for the event, confirmed the implementation of Stanislavski's techniques within the Berliner Ensemble's rehearsals:

So wie es unerlässlich ist, die Resultate zu betrachten, wenn man die Methoden prüfen will, ist es am besten, eine fremde Methode dadurch zu studieren, daß man sie in die eigene Arbeit einführt. Man sucht sich aus, was man selber auch macht, und auch in diesem Fall, wo man etwas schon seit langem selber auch gemacht hat, ist es oft noch ein Gewinn, die andere Arbeitsweise zu studieren, denn es wird einem oft erst dann bewußt, was man gemacht hat oder macht. (GBA 23, p. 226)

The '»Katzgraben«-Notate' are a comprehensive collection of notes recording the Berliner Ensemble's rehearsals, their abundance indicating both the significance of the production and the extent of Brecht's commitment to it. Distinguished from the 'Modellbücher' in that they present a thorough documentation of the rehearsal *process*, the notes are comparable with Stanislavski's own detailed rehearsal accounts. Brecht's decision to incorporate Stanislavskian techniques lies, to some extent, in the nature of the play itself. As

both the characters and rural community would be largely unfamiliar to theatre audiences in Berlin,¹ Brecht was concerned that they should appear authentic. Stanislavski's methods of portrayal were suited to a contemporary East German play which offered a realistic depiction of the new socialist society. In a letter dated 17th June 1952, Brecht thanked Fritz Lange of the 'Zentrale Kommission für staatliche Kontrolle' for some material, including reports and photographs pertaining to rural issues, indicating that he was engaged in the process of gathering authentic background documentation in preparation for the production:

Die Akten über die Untersuchung einiger Dörfer waren mir sehr nützlich. Das Berliner Ensemble hat ein Stück von Strittmatter über den Klassenkampf auf dem Dorf angenommen, und die Kenntnis, die ich aus den Akten habe, hilft mir sehr viel bei der Bearbeitung des Stückes. (*GBA* 30, p. 129)

As Matthew Philpotts points out, Brecht's initial request for this material dates from 1951, indicating that his interest in the production predated both the height of the official Stanislavski wave and the peak of the political pressure on him. In establishing a pre-history for the project "beyond the immediate context of early 1953" Philpotts convincingly shows that the evidence begins "to hint at a more serious commitment to it on Brecht's part."²

In order that the production would have a documentary feel, set-designer Karl von Appen and Peter Palitsch visited Lausitz to carry out their own detailed

¹ Although in accordance with the 'Ernteeinsatz' programme, various categories of townsfolk were required to work on the land for two weeks during the harvest season.

² Matthew Philpotts, "Aus so prosaischen Dingen wie Kartoffeln, Straßen, Traktoren werden poetische Dinge!" Brecht, *Sinn und Form*, and Strittmatter's *Katzgraben*', 63.

‘Milieustudien’. A rehearsal note entitled ‘Dekoration’ confirms that much consideration was given to achieving authentic scenic detail:

Die Bühnenbilder müssen authentischen Charakter haben. Wir zeigen den Städtern die Vorgänge auf dem Land. [...] Es wurde die Entscheidung getroffen, den Bildern dokumentarischen Anstrich zu geben, also sie so zu malen, daß sie an Photographie erinnerten. (*GBA* 25, pp. 404-05)

Manfred Wekwerth, Brecht’s assistant on the production, confirms the fact that many of the members of the Berliner Ensemble were largely unfamiliar with such a degree of photographic detail:

Als wir Assistenten seine Skizzen in Händen hielten, waren wir sehr verwundert. Eigentlich verstanden wir sie nicht [...]. Hier nun traten uns merkwürdig kompakte, bis ins Detail genaue – ja, wie uns schien, übergenaue – Figuren entgegen. Sie muteten zunächst statisch an, mit ihren voll ausgebildeten Gesichtern, die bis in Wimpern und Brauen hinein bestimmt waren. Unsere Verwunderung ging bis zur Ablehnung.³

Wekwerth recalls Brecht’s enthusiasm for von Appen’s designs and the motivation behind his decision to work with such a representative style of scenic detail:

um so mehr erstaunte uns das Verhalten Brechts [...]. Er war von dieser neuartigen Genauigkeit entzückt und stellte Vergleiche mit der Porträt-Malerei des Velasquez an. Später erklärte er uns seine Gründe. Das Stück »Katzgraben« spielte in einer unbekannten Gegend, unter unbekannten Menschen [...] die dort lebenden und wirkenden, dem Theater bis dahin unentdeckten Menschen vollbrachten eine gesellschaftliche Umwälzung großen historischen Formats; in ihnen und durch sie trat eine neue Klasse die Herrschaft an. Eine flüchtige, auflösende Malweise hätte die soziale Bedeutung, das Gewicht dieser Menschen und dieser Vorgänge verdeckt.⁴

³ Friedrich Dieckmann, *Karl von Appens Bühnenbilder am Berliner Ensemble* (Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1971), p. 25.

⁴ Friedrich Dieckmann, *Karl von Appens Bühnenbilder am Berliner Ensemble*, p. 25.

Backdrop, furniture and costumes were rendered in sepia tones, giving the production a 'photographic' quality. The intention was, as von Appen recalled in an article entitled 'Der Bühnenbildner im Ensemble' published in 1962:

durch Photocharakter der Darstellung etwas »Dokumentarisches«, »Authentisches« zu geben [...]. Also zeichnete ich an Ort und Stelle nach der Natur und benutzte diese Vorlagen für die Prospektmalerei, die nur in grauen Valeurs gehalten war [...]. Dann wurden diese Malereien photographiert, vergrößert und in Form von Backgrounds (wie sie im Film verwendet werden) aufgestellt. Die Möbel, Requisiten und Kostüme wurden in den Ton des Photos einbezogen.

Yet the aim was not to convince the audience that what they were witnessing was a slice of real life, but rather that the events were *based on* reality:

Wenn wir in manchen Fällen vom Naturvorbild ausgehen, so heißt das nicht, daß in unserer Arbeitsweise der Naturalismus einen Platz hat. Naturalismus ist Illusionismus. Und Illusionismus ist vorgetäuschte Realität.⁵

Whilst the sets and stage furniture were remarkable in their authenticity, Appen was careful to ensure that they did not overpower the spectator with the extent of their scenic detail:

B: Man wird sagen, man sei doch nicht ganz in dieser Landschaft, wenn man auf die Bühne blickt.

A: Nein, man ist im Theater und erblickt die künstlerische Gestaltung einer Landschaft. Es ist genug, damit die Phantasie angeregt wird; geben wir mehr, lähmen wir die Phantasie des Publikums. (*GBA* 25, p. 453)

The sets were thus designed to tease the audience, playfully frustrating any inclination to lose themselves in the world of the play:

Da war eine Wand mit aufgemaltem Fenster, neben dem ein ganz realer Abreißkalender hing; vor der Blumentapete mit dem gemalten Wandspiegel stand ein beispielbares Harmonium. Der Zuschauer sollte nicht auf provokante, sondern heitere Weise irritiert werden [...]. Eine Welt, ein Lebensbereich wurde genau

⁵ Karl von Appen, 'Der Bühnenbildner im Ensemble', *TZ*, 17, no. 7 (1962), 48-53 (51).

lebendig, ohne ihren Betrachter aufzusaugen, – so eindringlich als ohne Aufdringlichkeit.⁶

The scenic arrangements of the characters' living quarters were carefully designed by von Appen to reflect the social status of the occupants. Thus the narrowness of the Mittelländers' living room, its sparse, shabby furniture and the presence of a bed (suggesting that the family both lived and slept in the same room) all indicated that the occupants were not financially prosperous. In contrast, the Großmanns' living room was spacious and well furnished, a large pile of cigar boxes on a side table serving as a further indication of the financial security enjoyed by the family.⁷ A wooden plaque over the door in the living room with the words 'Gott gibt die Kuh, doch nicht den Strick dazu' emphasised the use of scenic detail to underline aspects of the story itself. Representing a marked departure from the use of placards and scene-titles in Brecht's earlier productions, this example illustrates how, rather than interrupting the action of the play, 'Literarisierung' was incorporated *within* the scenic arrangement of *Katzgraben* to emphasise socially significant elements of the 'Fabel':

Das Aufreißen, »Verfremden« des szenischen Vorgangs durch Inschriften, literarische Kommentare [...] in humoristische Diskretion zurückgetreten; die glossierende Parole trat nicht mehr von außen an die Szene heran, sondern war als deren Bestandteil verkleidet [...]. Verfremdung suchte die Illusion nicht mehr zu sprengen, sondern heiterte sie auf.⁸

⁶ Friedrich Dieckmann, *Karl von Appens Bühnenbilder am Berliner Ensemble*, pp. 67-68.

⁷ Friedrich Dieckmann, *Karl von Appens Bühnenbilder am Berliner Ensemble*, pp. 68-69.

⁸ Friedrich Dieckmann, *Karl von Appens Bühnenbilder am Berliner Ensemble*, p. 69.

Designed by Kurt Palm and based on both von Appen's detailed drawings and photographs taken in Lausitz, the costumes were similarly informed by close attention to realistic detail:

Auch die Kostüme sollten darauf abgepaßt werden. Die Farbigkeit mußte aus den Valeurs *einer* Fotografie ausgezogen sein, deren Stich schwarzgrünlich, sepia usw. war. Natürlich waren auch die Köstume streng aus ganz naturalistischen Grundfigurinen zu entwickeln. (GBA 25, p. 405)

Whilst the decision to use realistic costume seemingly represents a concession that stands out against Brecht's criticism of the "Russifizierung der Kostüme" in the Theatre Union's production of *Mother*, the costumes in *Katzgraben* were used to emphasise the 'Fabel' (GBA 24, p. 171). In an earlier note entitled 'Kurt Palm' composed during August 1952 (which, again significantly, predates the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz' and the height of the political pressure on Brecht to demonstrate the application of Stanislavski's methodology in his work), Brecht had compared Palm's use of costume in *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* to Stanislavski's use of set in his production of Adolphe Philippe d'Ennery and Eugène Cormon's play *Les Sœurs Gérard* to communicate "nicht nur im allgemeinen einen Schauplatz" but significant events in the plot:

Die Handlung des Stücks hat nicht nur Charaktere, sondern auch Geschehnisse, die der Kostümbildner betreuen muß. Gortschakow berichtet, wie Stanislawski bei der Probearbeit zu »Die Schwestern Gerard« vom Bühnenbildner verlangt, daß die Dekoration [...] für ein ganz bestimmtes Geschehnis [...] die beste Gelegenheit schaffen muß, dieses Geschehnis wirksam zu machen. Diese Forderung gilt auch für den Kostümbildner. In »Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder« wird der kühne Sohn der Courage [...] zur Exekution geführt. Palm hat den Burschen am Anfang in Lumpen gekleidet und barfuß gehen lassen. Jetzt kommt er in kostbarer schwarzer Rüstung: [...] er hat sich während seiner ganzen militärischen Karriere bereichert. (GBA 23, p. 211)

In the final scene of *Katzgraben*, in which the people celebrate the completion of the new road, the sepia coloured costumes which the characters had worn so far throughout the play, were replaced by more vibrantly coloured clothing: ‘Jacken in hellerer Farbe’ (*GBA* 25, p. 469). The colour-modification was carried through to the scenery, which included a colourful, brightly lit carousel, to convey both the energy and festivity of the occasion and the prospect of a bright new future for the people of Katzgraben.

The actors were required to approach their roles “möglichst naturalistisch”; a journal entry from November 1952 even indicates that the company, accompanied by Strittmatter, also visited the region prior to rehearsals. Indeed, with an emphasis on “größere Natürlichkeit und Einfachheit” (*GBA* 25, p. 471), considerable effort was invested in the individualisation of the characters in order that they would appear fully rounded, “ausgeprägte Individualitäten, echte Rollen, Bauern aus Strittmatters Bekanntschaft” (*GBA* 25, p. 441). Detailed ‘Lebensläufe’ were compiled by Strittmatter “da die Schauspieler selber das Milieu nicht gut genug kannten”.⁹ Indeed, Käthe Rülicke-Weiler confirms that character résumés were drawn up in order to help the actors – many of whom were unfamiliar with the new type of characters (the new working class from the LPG communities of the GDR’s ‘Aufbaujahre’) – to become acquainted with their roles:

Sie sollten den Schauspielern helfen, die für sie und das Publikum neuen Bühnenfiguren kennenzulernen [...]. [Es] fehlte [...] dem Berliner Ensemble an der

⁹ BBA 1852/18.

realen Kenntnis der neuen Menschen und Verhältnisse, und Strittmatter mußte mit seinen Erfahrungen helfen.¹⁰

The use of character résumés is borrowed directly from Stanislavski who used them extensively in his work with actors at the Moscow Art Theatre to consolidate:

wer Sie sind, was Ihnen widerfahren ist, unter welchen Verhältnissen Sie hier leben, wie Sie den Tag verbringen, woher Sie kamen, und viele andere vorgeschlagene Umstände, die Sie noch nicht geschaffen haben, die aber Ihre Handlungen beeinflussen.¹¹

An unpublished archival note written by Ruth Berlau and dated 10 April 1953, cites the use of résumés “zur Formung der Charaktere” as a positive aspect of Stanislavskian methodology.¹² In *Stanislavsky Directs*, Gorchakov refers to the use of character questionnaires in the rehearsals of A.S. Griboiedov’s play *Woe from Wit*:

Stanislavsky gave me a sheet of paper with the following questions on it: “Who are you? [...] Name, members of your family, their position in society [...]. What was the flow of your day like today? What were the good and bad incidents of the day? What work did you do? Whom did you see? [...] What is your outlook on the world? [...] I want each actor, no matter how small his part, to create his life on the stage on the basis of a complete knowledge of the life of the period and his own personal observation of his contemporary life.”¹³

In keeping with the Stanislavskian model, Strittmatter’s résumés likewise

¹⁰ Käthe Rülicke-Weiler, *Die Dramaturgie Brechts. Theater als Mittel der Veränderung* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1966), p. 263.

¹¹ Nikolai Abalkin, *Das Stanislavski-System und das Sowjet-Theater*, p. 199.

¹² BBA 1898/04.

¹³ Nikolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1973), pp. 148-49.

make detailed analysis of each character's social outlook and historical background.¹⁴ A provisional, unpublished draft of 'Einige Gedanken zur Stanislawski Konferenz' describes Brecht's earlier efforts to individualise the characters in the crowd scenes in *Der Prozeß der Jeanne d'Arc*. The note purposely conveys the idea that Brecht was already addressing concerns in his theatre of which Stanislavski was similarly aware:

So behandelten wir vor kurzem eine Volksszene (im "Prozess der Jeanne d'Arc") in einer besonderen, auf dem Theater unüblichen Art, zwar nicht auf Grund von Stanislawski-Studien, aber doch in seiner Weise, indem wir keine Komparsen, sondern eine Reihe unserer besten Künstler individuelle Charaktere darstellen ließen. Die Kritiker aber behandelten sie sofort als Komparsen, indem sie diese Künstler überhaupt nicht erwähnten! Ein Studium Stanislawskis hätte sie – und uns – vor diesem Fehler bewahrt.¹⁵

In 'Stanislawski-Studien [2]', Brecht observed retrospectively how Stanislavski-inspired character questionnaires *could have been used* in the production in order to further develop the characters and highlight their relationship to other crowd members:

Man könnte in der Ausarbeitung der einzelnen Personen in der Menge [...] noch einige Schritte weitergehen [...]. Man könnte die Fragebogen über den Tageslauf und den Lebenslauf der Figuren, die Stanislawski auch in Massenszenen ausfertigen läßt, mehr und mehr verlängern und vervollständigen [...]. Man sähe im Theater eine Menschengruppe, wie man sie im Leben sieht, und man würde nicht mehr erkennen und nicht besser fühlen, als man es im Leben tut. (GBA 23, p. 227)

Whilst this *mea culpa* attitude is clearly very useful, permitting Brecht to pursue his own means whilst simultaneously giving the appearance of complying with official cultural policy, it also implies that, in the context of the *Katzgraben*

¹⁴ See GBA 25, pp. 554-58.

¹⁵ BBA 1852/18.

production, the use of character résumés represented an *intentional* application of Stanislavski's actual methodology.

A combination of both gestic and psychological characterisation techniques was explored by the actors during the *Katzgraben* rehearsals to underline the social significance of the play. Working from outer expression to the inner life of the role, the '»Katzgraben«-Notate' reveal how Helene Weigel used physical gesture to individualise the role of Frau Großmann and determine the social 'Vorgeschichte' of the character:

B.: Warum eigentlich der Kropf und die schiefe Schulter?

Weigel: Das zeigt, er hat sie ihres Geldes wegen geheiratet. Und hätte ich nicht Geld im Hof stecken, würde er sich mein Herumregieren nicht gefallen lassen. Ich selbst käme darauf, herumzuregieren ohne dieses Geld, da ich religiös erzogen bin und »dem Manne untertan«. (GBA 25, p. 464)

Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler recalls how Weigel had a goitre made for her character as a sign of social significance, illustrating how Großmann had married her "not for her beauty, but for his farm."¹⁶ Stressing the interdependence of action and emotion and investing her role with characteristics she had observed from a member of her family, the notes also reveal that Weigel drew significantly on her own *personal experience* to find the correct tone for her part: "die Weigel »kannte solche Leute«, und bestimmte Partien der Rolle [...] suggerierte ihn [der Ton]"

¹⁶ Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler, (interviewed by Matthias Braun), 'Brecht and Weigel at the Berliner Ensemble', 8. Weigel's use of physical gesture as a means of expressing inner feeling as well as the vital social significance of the actions is not exclusive to her role as the Großbäuerin. Rüllicke-Weiler also recalls how, as Wlassowa in *Die Mutter*, Weigel developed her role from a physical characteristic: "she pulled up her shoulder a bit: in that way you could see a woman who had worked a lot, who had carried a lot".

(GBA 25, p. 457). In an interview with Werner Hecht in 1969, Weigel revealed how she had invested the role of Großbäuerin with characteristics taken from her “Tante Berta”. Weigel’s comments indicate that her characterisation had clear personal and psychological, even cathartic, overtones:

HECHT: Bei *Katzgraben* hatten Sie [...] die Rache an der Tante.

WEIGEL: ... an der Tante Berta, ganz recht. Nie vergessen!

HECHT: Bei der Rache ist Ihre Tante aber schlechter weggekommen, als sie war.

WEIGEL: Viel schlechter! So schlimm war’s gar nicht! Ich hab ihr viele Eigenschaften angehängt, die sie gar nicht hatte: sie hat keinen Buckel, keinen Kropf und keine solche Stimme gehabt, überhaupt nicht! ¹⁷

Similarly, Rüllicke-Weiler describes how Weigel’s role was:

shaped by a memory from her youth. As a child she had spent some time on a big farm and had not been treated very well. Now she was exposing the farmer’s wife critically. She said herself that it was a kind of belated revenge. ¹⁸

The process illustrates that even psychological techniques borrowed from Stanislavskian methodology, such as the technique of emotional recall, were explored during the *Katzgraben* rehearsals:

It is especially important to recall your own observations of people and events from life, those which will be useful as associations for widening the range of your knowledge of the thoughts, behaviour and situation of the character. ¹⁹

The personal element of ‘belated revenge’ may explain Weigel’s use of “frömmlicherische[n] Singsang” during rehearsal which, as a further note reveals,

¹⁷ The full transcript of the interview which took place on 16. November 1969 can be found in Hecht’s book, *Helene Weigel: Eine große Frau des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 11-68 (p. 12).

¹⁸ Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler interviewed by Matthais Braun, ‘Brecht and Weigel at the Berliner Ensemble’, 8.

¹⁹ Nikolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs*, p. 85.

was considered too alienating to be retained in the final performance:

Der frömmelerische Singsang, in dem die Weigel von der ersten Probe an die Großbäuerin reden ließ, hatte durch die äußerliche, mechanische Art zunächst alle befremdet, es war genau das, was Stanislawski »Mache« nannte (und für bestimmte Probenphasen zuließ). (GBA 25, p. 427)

Brecht had referred to the actor's use of over-acting in 'Stanislawski-Studien [5]':

Interessant, wie Stanislawski Mache zuläßt – *für die Probe!* So lasse ich Einfühlung zu – für die Probe! (Und beide werden wir für die Aufführung beides zulassen müssen, wenn auch in verschiedener Mischung.) (GBA 23, p. 230)

Interestingly, just as 'Einfühlung' is a preparatory performance technique which the Brechtian actor employs during their preliminary work on a character, 'Stanislawski-Studien [5]' indicates that, for the Stanislavskian actor, exaggeration is likewise only permitted at the rehearsal stage. Brecht's point of reference is a passage entitled 'Harmful and Useful Over-Acting' from Gorchakov's book *Stanislavsky Directs*. The extract details a rehearsal of a scene from A.S. Griboiedov's play *Woe from Wit* in which Stanislavski, usually opposed to over-playing, encourages the actor's use of exaggeration during their *preliminary* work on the character:

in the process of preparation and during the rehearsal period, over-playing sometimes is not only useful but necessary [...]. And the director must not only allow it but suggest it [...]. I consider this *temporary* over-acting admissible and even useful, although it is done *only for a few minutes during the rehearsal*. [Emphasis mine]²⁰

Comparing the rehearsal to a chain of experiments, Stanislavski tells his actors not to be "afraid of exaggerating anything [...] circumstances, feelings, atmosphere".²¹ "Temporary over-acting" is permitted in order to broaden the

²⁰ Nikolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs*, p. 183 and p. 188.

²¹ Nikolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs*, p. 250.

‘given circumstances’ and explore how far the character “would go if they were not restrained by the conditions of time, by the surroundings, by the line within which the character grows, and by an artistic sense of proportion”.²²

‘Stanislawski-Brecht’, an unpublished note, reiterates the importance of “temporary” empathy “für die Probe” during the actor’s imaginative work on a role, as outlined in ‘Stanislawski-Studien [3]’:

Das bedeutet also nicht, daß B. keine Einfühlung duldet, es bedeutet im Gegenteil, daß er sie benötigt. Um sich von der Figur distanzieren zu können, muß der Schauspieler sie zunächst erforscht verstanden haben. Das Publikum muß die Handlungsweise der Figur begreifen, verständlich finden, bevor es sie kritisieren kann. Tiefe und Umfang der Einfühlung – nehme ich an – bestimmen Tiefe und Umfang der möglichen Kritik.²³

Composed by one of Brecht’s co-workers and dated 1 June 1953, the note goes on to confirm the recommendation that Erwin Geschonneck explore the use of empathy during rehearsals within the context of his preparatory work on the figure of Grossmann:

Auf den ersten Proben zu *Katzgraben* [...] gaben zum Beispiel Helene Weigel und Ekkehard Schall ihre Figur “ganz” d.h. sie rechtfertigten. Die Regie beliess diese Rollenkonzeption und verschärfte – wahrscheinlich unmerklich für den Schauspieler – nur die Punkte, in der es ihr darauf ankam, die Figur der Kritik auszusetzen. Erwin

²² Nikolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavsky Directs*, p. 186. The ‘»Katzgraben«-Notate’ reveal that exaggeration was applied at various points throughout the rehearsals. A note entitled ‘Stummfilm/Formalismus’ describes how, during the lighting rehearsal, the actors were asked to portray “die wichtigsten Drehpunkte ihrer Rolle und die Komik des mimisch übertreibenden Stummfilms [...]. Die Drehpunkte gewannen dadurch an Deutlichkeit” (*GBA* 25, p. 464).

²³ See also the use of proportional relationship comparison in ‘Kurze Beschreibung’ to describe the correlation between the actor’s ability to maintain distance from the character, and the audience’s own critical distance from it (*GBA* 22.2, pp. 644). Brecht uses a proportional analogy in ‘Stanislawski-Studien [3]’ in an attempt to make the process appear more scientific.

Geschonneck kritisierte seine Figur von Anfang an, so sehr, daß ihn die Regie zu Einfühlung zwingen mußte.²⁴

The episode is further documented in the '»Katzgraben«-Notate' and indicates that the actors were advised against approaching their roles in an overly critical manner:

Hurwicz: Aber Sie sind ja gegen Einfühlung Brecht.

B.: Ich? Nein. Ich bin dafür, in einer bestimmten Phase der Proben. Es muß dann nur noch etwas dazukommen, nämlich die Einstellung zur Figur, in die ihr euch einfühlt, die gesellschaftliche Einschätzung. Ich empfahl gestern Ihnen, Geschonneck, sich in den Großbauern einzufühlen. Es schien mir, Sie gaben nur die Kritik der Figur und nicht die Figur. (*GBA* 25, p. 439)

Audience feedback from one of the preview performances of the play had indicated that the figure of Großmann was not credible, his 'clownish' manner obscuring the social 'Grundhaltung' of a character who seeks financial gain from those dependent on him (*GBA* 25, p. 432). Concerned that Geschonneck's exclusively critical portrayal of Großmann would render the character a comic, and therefore insignificant, figure, Brecht urged the actor to concentrate on the 'Vermenschlichung des Großbauern' through the subjective justification of the role (*GBA* 25, p. 438). Indeed, it is interesting that Brecht himself makes use of the term 'Rechtfertigung' which, as we have seen is familiar from the critical Stanislavski commentaries of the late 1930s, to recommend that Geschonneck focus on the justification of the character:²⁵

Sie, Geschonneck, sind so sehr gegen Ihre Figur, geben Sie so schonungslos dem Gelächter preis, daß Ihr Großbauer ein Popanz wird. So auftretend, könnte er den Klassenkampf keinen Tag führen. Sie müssen jetzt einiges zu seiner subjektiven

²⁴ 'Stanislawski-Brecht (Besprechung an 1. Juni)', BBA 551/136.

²⁵ Brecht's reaction to the use of 'Rechtfertigung' within Stanislavskian theatre is discussed in Chapter Two. See pp. 144-46.

Rechtfertigung tun. Zeigen Sie ihn als einen intelligenten Mann und gewieften Unterhändler, der nur durch die neue Lage umgeworfen wird. (*GBA 25*, pp. 435-36)

Conveying Brecht's concern to ensure that the characters were convincing, the '»Katzgraben«-Notate' also highlight his efforts to ensure that the use of naturalistic detail and empathic acting did not eclipse the socially significant 'super-objective', or 'Grundgestus', of the play:

Und nun etwas, was für die ganze Darstellung des Stücks wichtig ist: Unsere Hauptaufgabe ist es, die neue Lebensweise auf dem Dorf zu zeigen, die erregende Entwicklung, das neue große Produzieren, die neuen Haltungen im Kampf mit alten Haltungen, sogar bei ein und derselben Figur. Und wir müssen herausbekommen nicht nur Erkenntnisse, sondern auch, und das besonders, Lust an diesem neuen Leben, Stolz auf die neuen Lösungen und Leute. (*GBA 25*, p. 410)

Whilst the characters themselves were carefully researched to ensure that "sie sich logisch und ohne Lücken entwickelten", similar emphasis was given to guaranteeing that "dasselbe geschah mit den Situationen, der Fabel" (*GBA 25*, p. 466). The following extract from a rehearsal note entitled 'Stanislawski und Brecht' re-emphasises the significance of 'Einfühlung' as *one* stage in the actor's preparatory work on a character – one which precedes an eventual withdrawal to an informed perspective outside of the emotional life of the role:

B.: [...] Als Stückschreiber brauche ich die Fähigkeit des Schauspielers zu völliger Einfühlung und restloser Verwandlung, die Stanislawski wohl als erster systematisch faßt, aber auch, und vor allem, den Abstand von der Figur, den der Schauspieler als Vertreter der Gesellschaft (ihres fortschrittlichsten Teils) zu erarbeiten hat.

P.: Wie drückt sich das in den beiden Systemen aus?

B.: Stanislawski hat die Überaufgabe, wenn ich ihn richtig verstehe. Bei mir kommt der Einfühlungsakt ...

P.: den Stanislawski herbeizuführen lehrt...

B.: in einer andern Probenphase vor.

P.: Man könnte Ihr System, vom Stanislawskischen aus, also als ein System, die Überaufgabe betreffend, beschreiben?

B.: Ja, vermutlich. (GBA 25, p. 462)

Brecht encouraged the actor's emotional identification whilst at the same time stressing the significance of their ultimate critical distance from the character, thereby ensuring that the actor's subjective engagement with the role was at all times underlined by a social element. Thus, empathy was permitted in accordance with the social responsibility of the theatre and the actor's task "als Vertreter der Gesellschaft" in emphasising the social significance of the story. 'Stanislawski und Brecht' reinforces the complexity of the situation in which Brecht found himself at the time of the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz'. Whilst it ostensibly seeks to stress the similarities (comparing Brecht's 'System' with that of Stanislavski), the note also implies that Brecht had not only *already* identified the importance of the actor's 'Abstand von der Figur', achieved in Stanislavskian theatre by the actor's focus on the 'super-objective', but that the process has a specifically *political* purpose in Epic Theatre as opposed to its non-dialectical role in the System. Indeed, whilst the attention to empathic detail and tendency towards individualised characterisation is clear from the notes, the greatest concern lay in ensuring that "das darin gesellschaftlich Wichtige heraustritt":

Einfühlung [scheint mir] nicht genug [...] außer vielleicht für naturalistische Stücke, wo die volle Illusion der Natur hergestellt wird [...]. [Stanislawski] spricht unaufhörlich von dem, was er die Überaufgabe eines Stückes nennt, und er befiehlt, alles der Idee unterzuordnen. Ich denke, er betonte die Notwendigkeit der Einfühlung oft nur, weil er die verächtliche Gewohnheit gewisser Schauspieler haßte, sich dem Publikum anzuschmieren, es hereinzulegen usw., anstatt ihre Darstellung auf die Figur, die sie zu spielen hatten, und auf die Ideen zu konzentrieren, auf das, was er so streng und ungeduldig die Wahrheit nennt. (GBA 25, p. 440)²⁶

²⁶ In *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski explains his emphasis on emotion as an effort to counteract the tendency to disregard feeling in acting: "I do admit that I incline towards the emotional side of

Yet, the '»Katzgraben«-Notate' nonetheless reflect an increased awareness of the theoretical modifications made to the System and the implication that Stanislavski's final practical concerns – namely the 'super-objective' and 'method of physical action' – enabled a critical attitude. A note entitled 'Stanislavski-Konferenz' demonstrates how, proceeding from the 'super-objective', the actors applied Stanislavskian methods in accordance with an emphasis on the socially significant, combining emotion and physical gesture to communicate the social 'Grundgestus' of the 'Fabel':

Die Theorie von den physischen Handlungen enthält ebenfalls viel Wissenwertes, wenn ich sie richtig verstehe, nämlich so, daß die Emotionen, Ausbrüche, seelischen Manifestationen im Gefolge der durch die Fabel sich ergebenden Handlungen auftreten müssen und sie nicht stören dürfen. (*GBA* 25, p. 454)

The contents register compiled by Käthe Rülicke-Weiler which accompanies the '»Katzgraben«-Notate' is revealing as far as this particular rehearsal note is concerned, referring to it as follows: "[...] Was kann man von Stanislavski lernen? Der Einfühlungsakt. Physische Handlungen [...]" (*GBA* 25, p. 552). Whilst the titular similarity to the earlier 'Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislavskis gelernt werden kann' is clear, the later text is characterised by specific references to Stanislavski's development of physical action, underlining Brecht's increased engagement with the theoretical modifications to the system.

'Der positive Held', a rehearsal note which takes the form of a dialogue between Brecht and Ruth Berlau, further exemplifies Brecht's concern to adopt a

creativity and I do this purposely because we are too prone to leave out feeling. We have altogether too many calculating actors [...] we see too rarely the living emotional creativity." Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 248.

receptive stance to the System, whilst at the same time conveying the sense that Stanislavskian methodology is insufficient, unless accompanied by an adequate political function:

Berlau: Die Ansicht ist, man müsse sich als Zuschauer so in eine Figur auf der Bühne einfühlen können, daß man wünscht, es ihr im Leben gleichzutun.

B.: [...] Damit Verlaß ist auf die Gesinnung, muß sie nicht nur impulsiv, sondern auch verstandesmäßig übernommen werden. Damit ein richtiges Verhalten nachgeahmt werden kann, muß es so verstanden worden sein, daß das Prinzip auf Situationen angewendet werden kann, die der vorgeführten nicht ganz gleichen. Es ist die Aufgabe des Theaters, den Helden so vorzustellen, daß er zu bewußter, nicht zu blinder Nachahmung reizt. (*GBA* 25, p. 456)

Whilst the 'method of physical action' and the notion of the actor's double focus on stage could be used to critical ends, the note reinforces the idea that Brecht's application of Stanislavski's theories did not merely represent a "blinde Nachahmung" of his techniques, but the selective and *conscious* implementation of those methods which could be most profitably put to use in Epic Theatre. Indeed, both Brecht's predicament and the purpose of the production are embodied in the statement that the play communicates a "neues, ansteckendes Lebensgefühl" and the urge "die Welt zu verändern" (*GBA* 25, pp. 423-24). Here the verb 'anstecken', familiar from Brecht's early critical Stanislavski commentaries, is applied to the theatre's social function and is an indication that any appropriation of Stanislavski's techniques will be combined with the politicised methodology of Brechtian Epic Theatre and undertaken with the strict 'objective' of promoting interventionist social insight.

The *Katzgraben* rehearsal notes perfectly convey the interdependence of emotion and action within the play. One note describes how Angelika Hurwicz

was encouraged to incorporate “möglichst viel Beschäftigungen” in her portrayal of Frau Kleinschmidt, in order to communicate the socially significant notion that her character’s work is never done. In one scene, in which Frau Kleinschmidt is shown resting from her work, Brecht describes how the character nonetheless “benutzt ihren Körper unaufhörlich, während sie ihn ausruht, um ihre Meinung, ihre Empfindungen auszudrücken” (*GBA* 25, p. 420). In a further scene Hurwicz’s performance was broken down into a series of physical actions, recalling Stanislavski’s own use of units and objectives.²⁷ Working from the physical embodiment of her role, Hurwicz executed a sequence of closely observed everyday tasks to communicate the social position of Frau Kleinschmidt:

Strittmatter riet, die Kleinschmidtin solle in der offenen Tür ihre Holzpantinen aneinander abklopfen und damit sozusagen den Dreck von Großmanns Feldern abschütteln. B. spielte vor, wie die Bäuerin todmüde hereinschlurft; es macht ihr schon Mühe, die Jacke zum Nagel hochzuhängen. (Beibehalten die Details, daß sie unmutig Kleinschmidts Jacke, die dieser an den Fenstergriff gehängt hat, an den richtigen Nagel hängt, nachdem sie den Besen, mit dem er sich die Schuhe gereinigt hat, ebenfalls ärgerlich vor die Tür gestellt hat, und daß sie Kleinschmidts Reisig mit dem Fuß zur Seite stößt: es verdreckt ihr die Stube). (*GBA* 25, p. 413)

The note illustrates how a combination of physical action and naturalistic detail was applied to establish the social implications of the character’s domestic routine and the political ‘Grundgestus’ of the scene: “wie die Kleinschmidtin, kommend von schwerer Arbeit (auf fremdem Feld), sich einer zweiten Arbeit zuwendet (der

²⁷ Stanislavski recommended the use of units and objectives to break down each scene of a play into separate moments which are expressed through action. All of these smaller units of action are linked together by the ‘super-objective’. See Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, pp. 111-

Arbeit im eigenen Haushalt)” (*GBA* 25, p. 413)²⁸. Likewise, ‘Hauptprobe’ describes how the actor playing Günter, a young miner, was encouraged to speak his lines with an “überlauter Stimme”, similarly suggesting the character’s social function: “B. motivierte schnell das Lautsprechen: er arbeitet den ganzen Tag mit einem sehr lauten Bohrer in der Grube und muß daher laut reden” (*GBA* 25, p. 469). Here, closely observed empathic detail – or, to use Stanislavskian terminology, ‘justification’ – was explored in conjunction with physical gesture (or, in this instance, with a “Vergrößerung des Gestus”), to illuminate the social determinants of human behaviour.

Another note reveals how idiosyncratic detail and action were applied to the portrayal of Steinert to accentuate the social attitude of the role, i.e. how the ‘Grundhaltung’ of a character is “häufig [...] eine politische Frage” (*GBA* 25, p. 421). Tired from his work as a miner during the day, in the evening Steinert pursues Party matters in Katzgraben. It was necessary, Brecht claimed, that the actor playing Steinert should convey this dialectic in the character’s actions “da muß man ein Studium daraus machen”:

Er ist körperlich müde. Das ist schwer zu spielen, durch ein ganzes Stück; es ist nicht genug, daß er sich so schnell wie möglich setzt, um auszuruhen. [...]. Aber es gibt viele Möglichkeiten. Eine ist etwa, daß man besonders wach spielt, mit kleinen Rückfällen. [...] Das Wichtigste ist, daß aus dieser Charakterisierung die Handlung

²⁸ The ‘»Katzgraben«-Notate’ reveal that Hurwicz was familiar with some of Stanislavski’s methods and, what is more, had used them in her work for many years: “Ich las sein »Geheimnis des schauspielerischen Erfolgs« [...], ich fand [...] Partien, die mir [...] als sehr wichtig vorkamen, und einiges darin habe ich jahrelang benutzt. Er spricht davon, daß man sich ganz konkrete Vorstellungen für die Darstellung von Gefühlen verschaffen muß und dazu die Phantasie einschalten soll” (*GBA* 25, p. 439).

gewinnt, die Fabel. Die Müdigkeit wäre schon allein deshalb gut, weil man zeigen kann, wie Steinert sie überwindet, frisch wird, auflebt, wenn er politischen günstigen Wind bekommt. [...] Hier ist übrigens wieder ein Beispiel dafür, daß der Schauspieler den Gestus nicht aus einzelnen Sätzen oder Äußerungen holen darf, sondern aus dem ganzen Gespinnst der Äußerungen einer Figur. (GBA 25, pp. 427-28)

In fact, the '»Katzgraben«-Notate' repeatedly emphasise the importance of physical action within the production, even in the context of scenes in which the characters have no lines:

B. beobachtete während der Durchsprechproben bei Dialogen gern den eben nicht Sprechenden. So konnte er sehen, wie dieser reagierte. Selbst bei einer Durchsprechprobe, wo nur markiert wurde und hauptsächlich nur die Lücken zwischen den Repliken ausgemerzt werden sollten, spielten die guten Schauspieler, wenn auch ganz reduziert auf das Minimum, die Reaktionen auf die Repliken der andern. B. interessierte kaum etwas so sehr wie das »Minimum«. (GBA 25, p. 470)

A note entitled 'Leerlauf' describes a scene in which the young miner, upon returning a book to Kleinschmidt, is reprimanded by the farmer for attempting to deceive him into believing he had read it. Brecht asks the actor to show the character's reaction at being discovered by Kleinschmidt:

Brecht: Wie reagieren Sie?

Der junge Schauspieler: Reagieren? Ich hab ja nicht mal einen Satz. Und sitzt noch dazu mit dem Rücken zum Publikum, also???

Brecht (lachend): Zeigen Sie uns mit dem Rücken, wie Sie reagieren. (GBA 25, p. 488-89)

Encouraged to concentrate on the motivation behind his silence in the scene, the actor reattempts the scene. Assuming a stiff posture, whilst at the same time impatiently tapping his feet and moving his head from side to side, the actor's bearing and physical activity this time convey the character's inner emotional state – his chagrin at being discovered by the farmer. Brecht concludes:

Vor allem darf der Schauspieler nicht »leerlaufen«, wenn er keinen Satz hat und mit dem Rücken zum Publikum sitzt. Der steife, beleidigte Nacken mit dem bücherleeren Kopf ist ein Beispiel für stumme Darstellungskunst. (*GBA* 25, p. 489)

The episode indicates that everything which takes place on stage must be underscored by an objective conveyed in the characters' actions:

Der Schauspieler muß etwas wollen, auch wenn er auf der Bühne in einer Szene nichts anderes zu tun hat als dazusitzen [...]. Passivität wurde aktiv.²⁹

Brecht compares the episode to a rehearsal described by Toporkov in 'Der Schauspieler im Ensemble' "in Hinsicht auf wortkarge Rollen, kleine Rollen, stumme Stellen" (*GBA* 25, p. 488). Having enquired as to a character's line of action in a particular scene, Stanislavski is similarly dismayed to receive the reply that, as the character is silent during the entire scene, there is no line of action:

Nach Beendigung der Probe fragte K.S. Stanislawski jeden der Mitwirkenden nach seiner Handlungslinie. Er wandte sich auch an den Darsteller der Rolle Melusows:

»Na, und Sie?«

»Ich habe ja hier nichts zu tun. Melusow schweigt während der ganzen Szene.«

Keine Antwort hätte K.S. Stanislawski stärker treffen können als diese.

»Wieso denn nichts? [...] vor Ihren Augen tritt in dem Schicksal der geliebten Frau ein solcher Umschwung ein, und Sie haben »nichts zu tun«. Wie ist das nur möglich? [...] Melusow weiß auch nicht, was er sagen soll, er ist in dieser Sache nicht kompetent, aber diese Tatsache darf ihn keinesfalls untätig und gleichgültig machen – im Gegenteil.«³⁰

²⁹ Herbert Jhering, 'Das Deutsche Stanislawski-Buch', *TZ*, 1, no. 6 (1946), 12-14 (13). Interestingly, the article discusses a similar example in which an actress "eine Sitzende unnatürlich gespielt hat, weil sie sich über den Grund und Ziel der Szene nicht klar war."

³⁰ W. Toporkow, 'Der Schauspieler im Ensemble', *Dramaturgie und Schauspielkunst: Methodische Beiträge*, 7 (Weimar: Studienmaterial des Deutschen Theater-Instituts und der Staatlichen Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten, 1952), p. 3. A copy of this booklet can be found in Brecht's personal library.

Stanislavskian études based on the 'Fabel' were also incorporated within the rehearsals for *Katzgraben*. To ensure that the 'Lied vom Wettbewerb', sung during the final scene, captured the overall energy and exuberance of the occasion, Brecht used a Stanislavski-inspired exercise, instructing the actors to sing *whilst working* – therefore simultaneously emphasising the spirit of human collaboration:

B.: Machen wir eine kleine Etüde à la Stanislawski! Ihr singt es beim Arbeiten, bei der Fertigstellung der neuen Straße. Also arbeitet!

Der Chor kam in Bewegung. Die jungen Männer schleppten beim Singen Kulissen herum, die Mädchen deckten Tische usw. usw.

B.: So klingt es besser. Werdet ihr euch merken können, wie es klingen muß, d.h. wie ihr es jetzt gesungen habt? (GBA 25, p. 443)

Concerned to create an impression of spontaneity and lively disorder in accordance with the festivity of the final scene, Brecht divided the stage into four separate areas, each under the direction of one of his assistants, advising them against a prescriptive realisation of the scene:

Es handelte sich darum, dem Schlußbild [...] jene Turbulenz zu verleihen, welche durch Spaß erzeugt wird und Spaß erzeugt. [...]

B.: Wichtig ist, daß der Regisseur kein Verkehrspolizist ist [...]. Nicht zuviel Geplantes, Geschicktes, Eingerichtetes! (GBA 25, pp. 443-44)

The critical reception of the production was harsh, very much adhering to the official idea that Brecht's and Stanislavski's approaches could not be reconciled. *Theater der Zeit* published a highly critical review of the play which questioned whether the idea of offering "einen verfremdeten Sachverhalt [...] nicht fehl am Platz ist." Brecht was criticised for having some of the actors appear on stage "in zwiefacher Gestalt [...] beispielweise als Elli und als die das Publikum belehrenwollende Schauspielerin Regine Lutz". This, the author of the article went on to suggest, led to:

einerseits einem fast stilisierten Überbetonen bestimmter Gesten und Handlungen, andererseits zu zeitweise naturalistischem bis chargierendem Theater.³¹

Latter day critics have queried the sincerity of Brecht's experiments with Stanislavskian techniques within the production. John Willett has dismissed the *Katzgraben* production and the extensive preparatory work, as 'evidence of a considerable effort on Brecht's part to meet the requirements of the official aesthetic policy of the day.'³² Ronald Hayman has similarly interpreted the play as an obvious "gesture of support for the regime"³³, coinciding as it did with a time of significant political pressure on Brecht to satisfy official aesthetic requirements. Indeed, the critical pressure on Brecht to bring his work into line with the authorised cultural policy had by no means eased following the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz'. In the immediate aftermath of the event *Theater der Zeit* published a selection of the contributions to the conference (including those of Langhoff and Weigel), a significant percentage of which only served to strengthen the claim that Brecht's methods could not be compared with those of Stanislavski. In an article entitled 'Kleine Redaktionelle Einmischung in die Debatte', Fritz Erpenbeck commended Langhoff's "wissenschaftlich[e] Sachlichkeit" in tackling the discussion, and, rather unsurprisingly, confessed that he too was similarly unable to reconcile:

die während der Konferenz aufgetauchte Anschauung [...], es gebe zwischen der Kunsttheorie [...] Bertolt Brechts und derjenigen K.S. Stanislawskis keine grundsätzlichen Widersprüche.³⁴

³¹ Lily Leder, *Katzgraben* review, *TZ*, 8, no.7 (1953), 57-60 (58).

³² John Willett, (ed. and trans.), *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 251.

³³ Ronald Hayman, *Brecht: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 362.

³⁴ Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Kleine Redaktionelle Einmischung in die Debatte', *TZ*, 8, no.6 (1953), 14-15 (14).

Erpenbeck's article served as little more than a summary reinforcement of the issues already broached at the conference, further underlining the extent of the pressure Brecht was under. Harald Hauser criticised the "Skizzenhaftigkeit [...] des Bühnenbildes, "Überintellektualisierung des Ausdrucks" and "intellektuelle Kälte" of the characters.³⁵ With specific reference to his production of *Urfaust*, Hauser accused Brecht of abstraction, contending that much of his work consciously led the audience into the realms of the abstract, a factor perceived as fundamentally inconsistent with the principles of Stanislavski's realistic theatrical approach:

Hier sehe ich einen wirklichen Gegensatz zur Stanislawski-Methode, nicht einen *graduellen* Unterschied, sondern einen *prinzipellen* Gegensatz.³⁶

Indeed, poorly received by the cultural authorities, the *Urfaust* production had been seen as a formalist affront against the national heritage.³⁷ *Neues Deutschland* accused Brecht of seeking a 'marionettenhafte Wirkung' at odds with 'tiefe menschliche Gefühle'. Invoking the name of Stanislavski, the Party mouthpiece had issued a clear warning to Brecht:

³⁵ Harald Hauser, 'Abstraktion', 13 and 14.

³⁶ Harald Hauser, 'Abstraktion', 14. Abstraction was considered synonymous with formalism and contrary to the official policy of Socialist Realism: "Die Formalisten leugnen, daß die entscheidende Bedeutung im Inhalt, in der Idee, im Gedanken des Werkes liegt. Nach ihrer Auffassung besteht die Bedeutung eines Kunstwerks nicht in seinem Inhalt, sondern in seiner Form [...]. Eine Formgebung in der Kunst, die nicht vom Inhalt des Kunstwerks bestimmt wird, führt in die Abstraktion". Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Ein Dokument neuer deutscher Kunstgeschichte', *TZ*, 6, no. 6 (1951), 5-7 (7).

³⁷ For further documentation on Brecht's production of *Urfaust* see: Bernd Mahl, *Brechts und Monks "Urfaust" Inszenierung mit dem Berliner Ensemble 1952/53* (Stuttgart; Zürich: Belser, 1986).

Die Pflege der demokratischen Elemente des nationalen Kulturerbes gehörte zu den wichtigsten Aufgaben, die sich Stanislawski gestellt hatte. Ohne ihre Verwirklichung hätte er das sowjetische Theater nicht auf die unerreichte Höhe heben, hätte er den Weg des sozialistischen Realismus nicht beschreiten können. Bertolt Brecht würde die großen künstlerischen Potenzen und die Ziele seines eigenen Lebenswerks zerstören, wenn er den Weg der Negierung des nationalen kulturellen Erbes weiterbeschreite.³⁸

Published two days after the premiere of *Katzgraben*, the article underlines the continuing pressure Brecht was still under to demonstrate his allegiance to the official cultural policy. Yet if, in the light of such opposition to his theatre, Brecht's decision to produce such an orthodox play and the timing of *Katzgraben* seem more than just co-incidental, it is worth noting that his interest in the piece both predates and exceeds the height of the pressure on him to meet the official requirements of the Party leadership. As Matthew Philpotts has shown, not only do the origins of the project date back as far as 1951, Brecht's decision to stage a revised version of *Katzgraben* in May 1954 is evidence of the *prolonged* and genuine "importance the play held for him".³⁹ Brecht's dedication to the project is further reflected in the fact that from early February much of his time was devoted to the rehearsals. Gerhart Szameit, a stage technician working with Brecht at the time, confirms the extent of his commitment to the production:

Wir probierten damals "Katzgraben", abends sollte "Courage" gespielt werden. Um 17 Uhr machte ich Brecht aufmerksam, daß wir jetzt umbauen mußten, und er sagte: 'Szameit, noch zehn Minuten'. Als ich ihn nach einer halben Stunde wieder erinnerte, sagte er: 'Ich probiere bis alles klappt.' Er sah nicht die Vorstellung am Abend, nur

³⁸ Johanna Rudolph, 'Weitere Bemerkungen zum 'Faust'-Problem', *Neues Deutschland*, 28 May 1953, 4.

³⁹ Matthew Philpotts, "'Aus so prosaischen Dingen wie Kartoffeln, Straßen, Traktoren werden poetische Dinge!'" Brecht, *Sinn und Form*, and Strittmatter's *Katzgraben*', 59.

die Probe. Dann gab's doch Krach, Brecht ließ die Vorstellung ausfallen und probierte bis abends.⁴⁰

In the aftermath of the conference, the emphasis was on the practical demonstration of those theoretical techniques to which Brecht had laid claim in 'Rede für die Stanislawski-Konferenz'. Willett casts doubt on the integrity of Brecht's engagement with Stanislavskian methodology within the context of the *Katzgraben* production, dismissing his decision to explore some of the Soviet practitioner's techniques as a calculated response to the criticism he had faced at the conference:

The cumulative effect on [...] Brecht was to make [...] him promise to set up a 'brigade' of the Ensemble to study Stanislavski, and meanwhile to use one or two Stanislavskian methods experimentally in the rehearsal of *Katzgraben* [...]. That was all.⁴¹

Yet the incorporation of some of Stanislavski's methods into the rehearsal process is consistent with Brecht's re-evaluation of the System on the basis of the modifications made by Stanislavski during the latter half of his career. As such, any element of outward compromise on Brecht's part must be viewed in accordance with his new awareness of these theoretical modifications and his emphasis on the techniques which could be used to highlight the social significance of the 'Fabel'. A note composed in the aftermath of the conference proposing the formation of 'Brigaden' within the Berliner Ensemble further indicates that the study of Stanislavski's methods was undertaken with a *critical*

⁴⁰ *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur. Zweites Sonderheft Bertolt Brecht*, hrsg. von der Deutschen Akademie der Künste (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1957), 465.

⁴¹ John Willett, *Brecht in Context*, p. 218.

attitude. Indeed, the conscious use of analogous phrasing to indicate the “Studium und Kritik” of Brecht’s methodology, ensures that the note remains nicely even-handed:

Wir müssen uns künstlerisch und weltanschaulich weiterentwickeln. Ich schlage daher die Formierung von Brigaden vor, die sich Aufgaben folgender Art stellen:

- 1) Studium und Kritik unserer Arbeitsweise
- 2) Studium und Kritik der Stanislawskischen Arbeitsweise
- 3) Kontrolle und Instandhaltung der laufenden Aufführungen
- 4) Veranstaltung von Extraproben für Qualifizierung einzelner Leistungen und Schulung junger Kollegen. (GBA 23, p. 246).

Although external pressure was considerable, an unpublished note dated February 1953 suggests that Brecht carried out the selection and actual implementation of Stanislavski techniques largely on his own terms and in the spirit of scientific experimentation. In a meeting with his collaborators at the Berliner Ensemble shortly before the conference, Brecht recommended the examination of all obtainable study material on Stanislavski, with the purpose of applying:

was uns bei unseren Aufgaben hilft, und wir werden das, was uns nicht hilft, weiterentwickeln. *Wir werden nicht einfach diese Methode übernehmen.* [Emphasis mine]⁴²

What is more, the rehearsal notes themselves reinforce the hypothesis that the production did not represent an absolute and unconditional affirmation of Stanislavski’s practices undertaken by Brecht in order to pay lip-service to official aesthetic requirements. Rather, the shortcomings of some of Stanislavski’s

⁴² BBA 134/70

methods are acknowledged in the notes, as certain techniques are revealed to be insufficient or inappropriate for the actors in their work on the role:

Mehr als andere Schauspieler hatte die Weigel in diesem Stück Schwierigkeiten, den Charakter ihrer Figur, der Großbäuerin, aufzubauen.

P.: Würde es Ihnen nicht helfen, wenn Sie sich den Tageslauf der Großbäuerin zurechtlegten? Was hat sie am Morgen getan, was hat sie gefrühstücket, mit wem hat sie gesprochen, wie fühlte sie sich körperlich?

Weigel: Das hilft nicht bei diesem Stück. Es hat Jahres-Abläufe, nicht Tages-Abläufe. Ich muß daran denken, was tat, äußerte, fühlte ich voriges Jahr? (GBA 25, p. 462)

Such examples, I would argue, confirm the integrity of Brecht's commitment to the methods explored within the rehearsals, underlining the notion that Brecht was engaged in a *selective* examination of those techniques which could further the work of the actor – the very essence of the statement he had asked Carl Weber to read at the 'Stanislawski-Konferenz':

Brecht had stated, after some compliments for Stanislavski's achievements, "Of Stanislavski's work methods we must adopt those which advance the individual work methods of our stage directors and actors, not those which might hinder them."⁴³

⁴³ Carl Weber, 'Periods of Precarious Adjustment: Some Notes on the Theatre's Situation at the Beginning and after the End of the Socialist German State', 29-30.

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